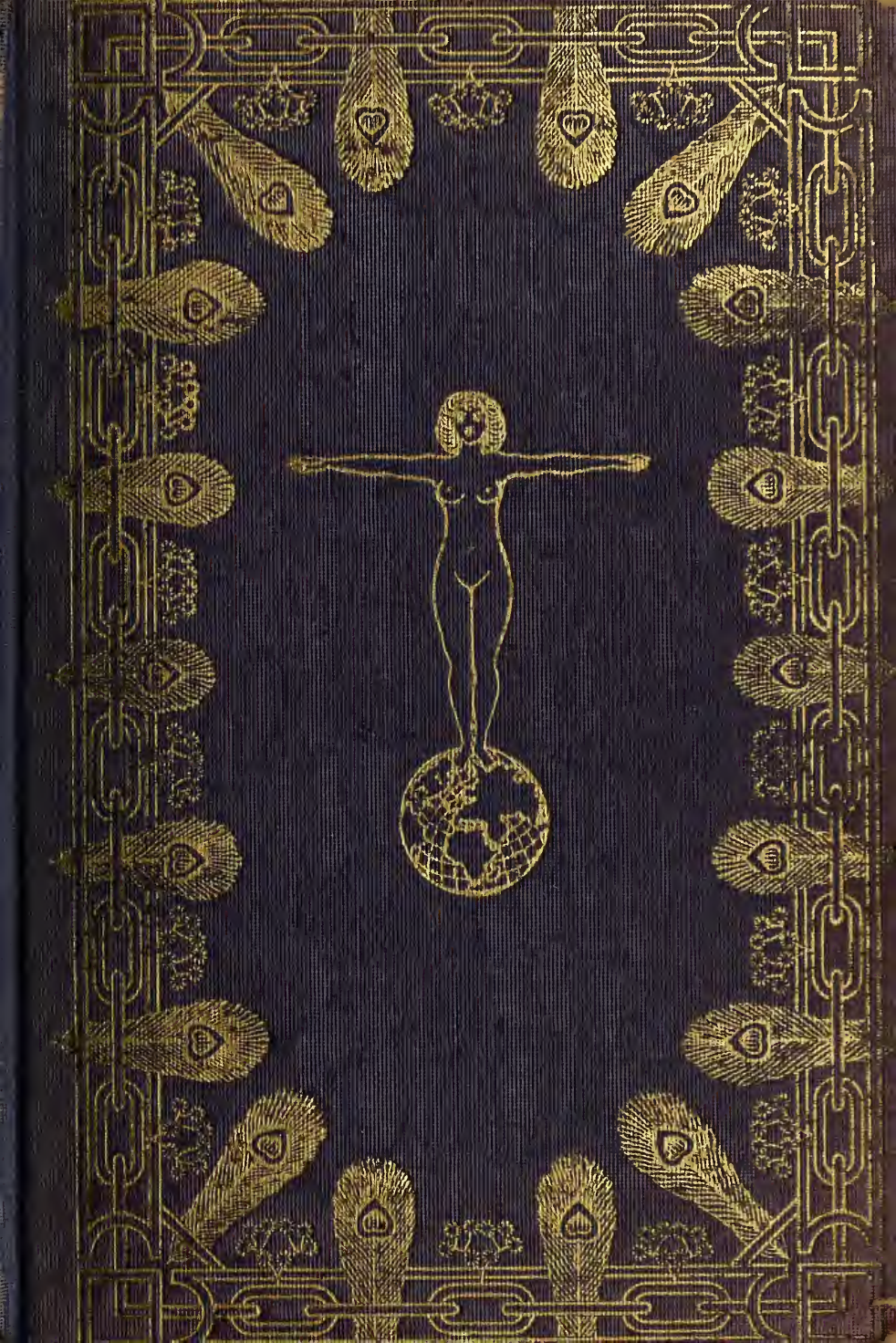

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THE LEGEND OF SAINT ROSALIE—MIRACLE OF THE ROSES

After the painting by J. Nogales.

WOMAN

In all ages and in all countries

WOMEN OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

by
Rev. ALFRED BRITTAIN
and
MITCHELL CARROLL, Ph.D.
With an Introduction by
J. CULLEN AYRE, Jr., Ph.D.
Of Harvard University

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

WHEN the historian has described the rise and fall of empires and dynasties, and has recounted with care and exactness the details of the great political movements that have changed the map of continents, there remains the question: What was the cause of these revolutions in human society—what were the real motives that were operative in the hearts and minds of the persons in the great drama of history that has been displayed? The mere chain of events as they have passed before the eye as it surveys the centuries does not give an explanation of itself. There must be a cause that lies behind these events, and of which they are but the effects. This cause, the true cause of history, lies in the minds and hearts of the men and nations. The student of the past is coming more and more to see that the only hope of making history a science, and not a mere chronicle, is to be found in the clear ascertainment and study of those psychological conditions which have made actions what they were. Foremost among those conditions have been the hopes, aspirations and ideals of men and women. These have been the greatest motive forces in the history of the world. These, quite as much as merely selfish considerations, have guided the conduct of the men who have made history, not merely those who have been leaders in the great movements of society, but the multitude of followers who have not

attracted the attention of historians, but have, nevertheless, given the strength and force to the revolutions of the world.

The deepest interest in the history of Christian women lies in the way in which woman's status in society has been modified by the new religion. The chronicle of saintly life and deeds is a part of that history. But there are, also, women who have signally failed to attain those virtues for which their religion called. These, too, have their place, for both have either forwarded or retarded the realization of woman's place in society. Often the heathen spirit is but half concealed under the mask of Christianity. But the whole tone of society has been changed, nevertheless, by the ideas and ideals which that religion brought before men's minds in a new and vivid manner.

The position of woman has been more influenced by Christianity than by any other religion. This is not because there have not been noble sentiments expressed by non-Christian writers; for among the rabbinical writers, for instance, are many fine sentiments that could have come only from men who clearly perceived the place of woman in an ideal human society. Nor because in Christianity there have not been men whose conception of woman was more suitable to the adherents of those faiths that have regarded her as a thing unclean. But from the very nature of the appeal which Christianity has made to the world, the place of woman in society has been changed. The new faith appealed to all mankind in the name of the humanity which the Son of God had assumed, and consequently it was forced to treat men and women as on a spiritual equality. It was forced by the natural desire for consistency to break down any barriers that might keep one-half of the human race from the full realization

of the possibilities of their natures, which were made in the image of God. It is in this relation of Christianity to the world, quite as much as in the sayings and precepts of its Founder and his Apostles, that has been found the ground for the great work of Christianity in raising the position of women in the world.

Christianity should in this respect be compared with the other religions that have attained prominence. Among those that were national religions, there has been no appeal to the world in general. They were bound up with the race, and their adherents were those of the race or nation in which they were to be found. Such religions have made no appeal to the individual. They had no propaganda. They did not extend to other nations. They were essentially national. In them there was no place for women. The father of the household represented his family, and although women had certain duties in connection with the household worship, it was only because they were under the power of some men. This is true of the religions of India, China, and the ancient religions of the Semitic race. In two of the great world-religions, those centring on Mahomet and Buddha, there has been no place for women as such. These religions are primarily the religion of men. But in the case of Christianity, the appeal has been to every human being, merely because of the human element. If there were to be no distinction on account of race or social condition, still less was there on account of sex. Male and female were alike in Christ. The Christian must be a believer for himself—the faith of no one else could serve for him. Marriage made no difference in the religious position of anyone. Such sentiments applied day after day in the course of the world's life could not remain without their effect, and the change wrought by them has been profound and lasting.

That there has not yet been the full realization of the ideal of Christianity in the matter of the position of woman in society is no stranger than the non-realization of the ideals of that or any other faith. The eternal ideas of right are sometimes extremely slow in their operation. The forces they have to overcome are strongly intrenched. But slow as may seem the progress, the power of right steadily gains and the temporary success of evil is soon past. The ways in which the triumph of the Christian ideal has been brought nearer have been at times very varied. At one time it may seem that the leaders in the cause of social regeneration have been wholly blind to the full significance of the faith they professed. Fantastic forms of asceticism have banished women from the society of those who were trying to lead the perfect life. But the more sympathetic study of the extravagances of religious enthusiasm has been able to discover that even in ages in which ideals seemed to be wholly opposed to those of latter ages, there has been the same fundamental conception which has been constantly striving for realization in the world.

In the light of subsequent history, it appears fortunate that the position of woman in the new society was not more fully and carefully defined by the teachers of the new religion. If the early Christian teachers had given their followers minute rules regulating their life and conduct, there might easily have been a return to a legalism that would have been disastrous for the new faith. Even the few regulations that are to be found in connection with matters of order and discipline in the Apostolic Church, so far as they have concerned women, have been frequently misunderstood and misapplied. They have been made of lasting obligation by many, rather than considered as the expression for the times and circumstances in which

the early Church was placed, of principles of propriety which might be very different from, if not indeed contrary to, the sentiments of another age. But by leaving the whole question open, with but a very few exceptions, the great working out of the freedom of the new faith was possible. Woman has been recognized by the world as man's helpmate. She is not his toy or his slave, but a sharer with him in the highest privileges of human nature. An appreciation of the tremendous responsibilities that have been put upon her by the fact of her womanhood has not separated her from man, but both are seen standing side by side in the New Kingdom.

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Preface

PREFACE

CHRISTIANITY introduced a new moral epoch in the course of human history. Its effect was necessarily transforming upon those who came under its sway. Being cosmopolitan in its nature, we have now to study woman as being somewhat dissociated from racial type and national manner, and we shall seek to ascertain how she met and was modified by Christian conditions. These had a larger effect upon her life than upon that of man; for, by its nature, Christianity gave an opening for the higher possibilities of her being of which the old religions took little account. In the realm of the spiritual, it, for the first time, assented to her equality with man. That the women of the first Christian centuries submitted themselves to the influence of that religion in a varying degree, the following pages will abundantly show. And it will be seen that in the many instances where the Christian doctrine was not permitted to dominate the life, the dissimilarity of those women from their prototypes in former heathendom is correspondingly lessened. While it is not possible to treat this subject without illustrating the above-mentioned fact, the authors beg to remind the reader that this is distinctively a historical and not a religious work. Though, under other circumstances, they would be very willing to state positive views in regard to many questions herein suggested, it is not within the province of this book to

defend or refute any religious institution. The aim is solely and impartially to represent the life of the Christian women of the first ages.

Though this is a work of collaboration, Mr. Brittain is solely responsible for the part of the book treating of the women of the Western Roman Empire, and Mr. Carroll is solely responsible for that discussing the women of the Eastern Roman and Byzantine Empires. Differences of personal characteristics, based upon dissimilarity of national temperament, reveal themselves in these women of Rome and Constantinople, but the Christian principle, through its transforming and elevating influence on the lives of pagan women, gives unity to the volume, and presents a type of womanhood far superior to any that had up to this time been produced by the Orient or early Greece or ancient Rome.

ALFRED BRITTAIN,
MITCHELL CARROLL.

Part First

Women of the Western Empire

Chapter I

The Women of the Gospel Narrative

I

THE WOMEN OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVE

THE study of the early Christian women takes up a phase of the history of woman which is peculiar to itself. It is, in a sense and to a degree, out of historical sequence. It deals with a subject in which ideas and spiritual forces, rather than the effect of racial development, are brought into view. It presents difficulties all its own, for the reason that not only historical facts about which there can be no contention must be mentioned, but also theories of a more or less controversial nature. We shall endeavor, however, as far as is possible, to confine ourselves to the recapitulation of well-authenticated historical developments and to a dispassionate portrayal of those feminine characters who participated in and were influenced by the new doctrines of early Christianity.

In writing of the women who were the contemporaries and the acquaintances of the Founder of Christianity the difficulty is very greatly enhanced by the fact that everything related to the subject is not only regarded as sacred, but is also enshrined in preconceptions which are held by the majority of people with jealous partiality. Our source of information is almost exclusively the Bible; and to deal with Scriptural facts with the same impartiality with which one deals with the narrative of common history is

well-nigh impossible. There are few persons who are exempt from a prejudicial leaning, either in favor of the supernatural importance of every Scriptural detail or in opposition to those claims which are commonly based upon the Gospel history. We hear of the Bible being studied merely as literature, a method most highly advantageous to a fair understanding of its meaning and purport, but possible only to some imaginary, educated person, unacquainted with the Christian religion and totally unequipped with theological conceptions. That which is true of the Bible as literature is also applicable to the Scripture considered as history.

Yet we shall endeavor to bear in mind that we are not writing a religious book, and that this is not a treatise on Church history; it is ordinary history and must be written in ordinary methods. Consequently, in order to do this subject justice and to treat it rightly, we must endeavor to remove the women mentioned in the Gospels as far as possible from the atmosphere of the supernatural and to see in them ordinary persons of flesh and blood, typifying the times as well as the circumstances to which they belonged. Though they played a part in an event the most renowned and the most important in the world's history, yet they were no more than women; in fact, they were women so commonplace and naturally obscure, that they never would have been heard of, were it not for the Character with whom they were adventitiously connected. A memorial has been preserved, coeval, and coextensive with the dissemination of the Gospel, of the woman who anointed Christ; but solely on account of the greatness of the Object of her devotion.

Our purpose in this chapter is to ascertain what manner of women they were who took a part in the incomparable event of the life of Christ, what their part was in

that event, and how it affected their position and their existence.

The whole history of the Jewish race and all the circumstances relating thereto abundantly justify the application to the Jews of the term "a peculiar people." A branch of the great Semitic division, in many ways they were yet most radically distinguished from every other part of the human family. By many centuries of inspired introspection they had developed a religion, a racial ideal, and national customs which entirely differentiated them from all other Eastern peoples. The Jew is one of the most remarkable figures in history. First there is his magnificent contribution to religion and world-modifying influences, so wonderfully disproportionate to his national importance; then there is the marvellous persistency of his racial continuity.

That which set apart the Jews from other nations was mainly their religion. These peculiar people, inhabiting at the time of Christ a small tract of country scarcely larger than Massachusetts, deprived of national autonomy, being but a second-class province of the Roman Empire, nevertheless presumed to hold all other races in contempt, as being inferior to themselves. This religious arrogance, manifesting itself in a vastly exaggerated conception of the superiority, both of their origin and of their destiny, surrounded the Jews with an impenetrable barrier of reserve. That national pride which in other peoples is based on the memory of glorious achievements on the battlefield, on artistic renown, or on commercial importance, found its support among the Jews in their religious history, in their divinely given pledges, and in laws of supernatural origin. And indeed they were a race of religious geniuses; they were as superior in this respect as were the Greeks in the realm of art and the Romans in that of government.

These facts, which are so universally acknowledged as to need no further reference here, warrant a closer study of the manner of life of the ancient Jewish women than that to which we can afford space.

In the Gospel narrative women hold a large place. As is natural, a very great deal of the grace and beauty of the record of Christ's life is owing to the spirit and presence of the feminine characters. This the Evangelists have ungrudgingly conceded. There does not seem to have been the least inclination to minimize the part played by women; indeed, their attitude toward Christ is by inference, and greatly to their credit, contrasted with that of the men. The women were immediately and entirely won to Christ's cause. They sat at His feet and listened with gratitude to the gracious words which He spake; they brought their children to be blessed by Him; they followed Him with lamentations when He was led away to death. There were among their number no cavillers, no disbelievers, none to deny or betray. When the enemies of Jesus were clamoring for His death and His male disciples had fled, it was to the women He turned and said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." Well might the instincts of the Daughters of Jerusalem incline them to sympathize with the work and suffering of the Man of Nazareth, for it is incontrovertible that no other influence seen in the world's history has done so much as Christianity to raise the condition of woman.

The position of woman in Palestine, though much inferior to that of man, was far superior to that which she occupied in other Oriental nations. Jewish law would not permit the wife to fall to the condition of a slave, and Israelitish traditions contained too many memories of noble and patriotic women for the sex to be held otherwise than

in honor. A nation whose most glorious records centred around such characters as Sara, Miriam, Deborah, Esther, and Susanna could but recognize in their sex the possibility of the sublimest traits of character. Moreover, every Hebrew woman might be destined to become the mother of the long hoped for Messiah, and the mere possibility of that event won for her a high degree of reverence.

At the same time, the Jewish women, like those of all other ancient nations, were held in rigid subordination; nor was there any pretence made of their equality with men before the law. A man might divorce his wife for any cause: a woman could not put away her husband under any circumstances. A Jewish woman could not insist on the performance of a religious vow by which she had bound herself, if her husband or her father made objection. Yet, from the earliest times, the property rights of Israelitish women were very liberal. In the Book of Numbers it is recorded how Moses decreed that "If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren." But tribal rights had to be considered. Possessions were not to be alienated from one tribe to another. Hence it was also decreed that "Every daughter that possesseth an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel, shall be wife unto one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may enjoy every man the inheritance of his fathers." In the time of Christ, however, this restriction on marriage was unnecessary, ten of the tribes not having returned from the Captivity. The house at Bethany where Jesus was entertained belonged to Martha; and we read of wealthy women following Him and providing for His needs out of their own private fortunes. In the early days, among the Hebrews, marriage by purchase from

the father or brothers had been the custom; but in the time of which we are writing a dowry was given with the bride, and she also received a portion from the bridegroom.

The inferior position of Jewish women is frequently referred to in the rabbinical writings. A common prayer was: "O God, let not my offspring be a girl: for very wretched is the life of women." It was said: "Happy he whose children are boys, and woe unto him whose children are girls." Public conversation between the sexes was interdicted by the rabbis. "No one," says the Talmud, "is to speak with a woman, even if she be his wife, in the public street." Even the disciples, accustomed as they were to seeing the Master ignore rabbinical regulations, "marvelled" when they found Him talking with the woman of Sychar. One of the chief things which teachers of the Law were to avoid was multiplying speech with a woman. The women themselves seem to have acquiesced in this degrading injunction. There is a story of a learned lady who called the great Rabbi Jose a "Galilean Ignoramus," because he had used two unnecessary words in inquiring of her the way to Joppa. He had employed but four.

By the Jews women were regarded as inferior not only in capacity but also in nature. Their minds were supposed to be of an inferior order and consequently incapable of appreciating the spiritual privileges which it was an honor for a man to strive after. "Let the words of the Law be burned," says Rabbi Eleazar, "rather than committed to women." The Talmud says: "He who instructs his daughter in the Law, instructs her in folly." In the synagogues women were obliged to sit in a gallery which was separated from the main room by a lattice.

Yet it is scarcely to be supposed that in everyday Jewish life the pharisaical maxims quoted above were adhered

to with any great degree of strictness. Especially in Galilee, where there was much more freedom than in the lower province, it may well be imagined that there existed a wide difference between these arrogant "counsels of perfection" and the common practice. There is no doubt that the rabbis and the scribes observed the traditions to the minutest letter; but inasmuch as in these days it would be misleading to delineate the common life of a people by the enactments found on their statute books, we are justified in concluding that ordinary existence in ancient Palestine was not nearly such a burdensome absurdity as the rabbinical law sought to make it. Human nature will not endure too great a strain. At any rate, we can but believe that, subordinate as she may have been, the Jewish woman found ample opportunity to assert herself. The rabbi may have scorned to multiply speech with his wife on the street, but doubtless there were occasions which compelled the husband to endure a multiplicity of speech on the part of his wife at home. It was not without experience that the wise man could say: "A continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike."

The sayings of the scribes, which are derogatory to the female sex, are abundantly offset by many injunctions of an opposite nature which are found in the sacred and in the expository writings of the Jews. One of the first things drilled into the mind of a young Hebrew was that his prosperity in the land depended wholly upon his observance of the law that he should "honor his father and his mother." The virtuous woman portrayed by King Lemuel was still the ideal in the time of Christ: "Her sons rise up and praise her; her husband also extols her." The declaration in the book of Proverbs that "the price of a virtuous woman is set far above that of rubies" is not to be understood in the sense of irony. "Honor your

wife, that you may be rich in the joy of your home," says the Talmud; and there was a proverb: "Is thy wife little? then bow down to her and speak." The Son of Sirach said: "He that honoreth his mother is as one that layeth up treasure . . . and he that angereth his mother is cursed of God."

As among all other Eastern peoples, the education of Jewish girls was greatly neglected; but it can hardly be said that they were losers on that account. They were simply saved a great deal of profitless labor which fell upon their brothers. The learning of the Jews, so far as higher education was concerned, did not add much either to the grace or the enjoyment of life. It was pedantry of the driest and dreariest kind. It consisted of interminable glosses upon the Law and of the "traditions of the elders." It exercised no faculties of the mind excepting the memory and such powers of reasoning as are employed in subtle casuistry. There was in it nothing of art or science, or even of history, except Jewish history. Greek learning was abhorred by the strictly orthodox. They said the command was that a man's study should be on the Law day and night; if anyone therefore could find time between day and night he might apply it to Gentile literature. There were schools in abundance; but they are spoken of only in relation to boys. In the fundamental moral precepts, however, and in the highest national ideals, the Jewish girls were no less thoroughly trained than were their brothers. Ozias testified to Judith, who with feminine strategy and masculine courage overthrew Holophernes: "This is not the first day wherein thy wisdom is manifested; but from the beginning of thy days all the people have known thy understanding, because the disposition of thy heart is good." Of the chaste Susanna it was said that, her parents being righteous, they taught

their daughter according to the Law of Moses. Timothy owed his early training to his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois. The Israelitish mother, in the dawn of her children's intelligence, carefully taught them the lore of the ancient Scriptures and instructed them in the principal tenets of the Jewish faith. There never existed another nation that cared so thoroughly for the training of its young in the doctrines of morality and in those national memories which are efficacious in the perpetuation of an ardent patriotism. In all this the girls were privileged equally with the boys. As Edersheim says: "What Jewish fathers and mothers were; what they felt towards their children; and with what reverence, affection, and care the latter returned what they had received, is known to every reader of the Old Testament. The relationship of father has its highest sanction and embodiment in that of God towards Israel; the tenderness and care of a mother in that of the watchfulness and pity of the Lord over his people."

Religion was the breath of Jewish life. It is absolutely impossible to touch on Hebrew history, customs, or ideals, in any period or to any extent, and not to come into contact with Hebrew religion. This, as we know, was full of burdensome ritual and formalities; the Law, with all its elaborate ramifications, governed the minutiæ of daily existence. Yet it is again necessary to be careful not to judge too broadly of Jewish life by the rules which the Talmud shows were laid down by the rabbis. The Pharisees, who made the formalities of religion their one business in life, could observe all the multitudinous feasts and fasts, all the ritual of washings, and bear in mind the innumerable possibilities of breaking the Sabbath—such, for example, as accidentally treading on a ripe ear of grain, which would be the act of threshing; but that the

common people lived thus straitly is impossible of belief, and for this reason they were held in contempt by the strictest sect. How some of these troublesome laws related to the women is suggested by Edersheim; "A woman (on the Sabbath) must not wear such headgear as would require unloosing before taking a bath, nor go out with such ornaments as could be taken off in the street, such as a frontlet, unless it is attached to the cap, nor with a gold crown, nor with a necklace or nose-ring, nor with rings, nor have a pin in her dress. The reason for this prohibition of ornaments was, that in their vanity women might take them off to show them to their companions, and then, forgetful of the day, carry them, which would be a 'burden.' Women were also forbidden to look in the glass on the Sabbath, because they might discover a white hair and attempt to pull it out, which would be a grievous sin; but men ought not to use looking-glasses even on weekdays, because this was undignified. A woman may walk about her own court, but not in the street, with false hair."

These are only instances of regulations which were so numerous as severely to tax the memory of those who did little else but study to observe them. We are sure that they could not have characterized the common Jewish life; yet there was not a man, however loose in conduct or humble of birth, who was not well versed in the moral precepts of Moses and in the exalted national ideals of the Prophets. In the cases—and they were many—where this wisdom was not justified of her children, the punctilious observance of outward forms, conjoined with the most extreme arrogance of race, laid the Jew open to the contempt of both Greek and Roman. Yet there was enough latent impetus and genuine religious life in Israel to form the basis of that Christianity which was destined to overreach Greek philosophy and to revolutionize Rome;

and there are many indications in the Gospels that the credit for the incalculable service of preserving alive the smouldering embers of piety must, to a predominant degree, be awarded to the mothers and daughters of Israel. Elisabeth, no less than Zacharias her husband, was a type of many who "walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." There was also one Anna whose devotion was so great that she seemed to make the temple her constant home. Nevertheless, in religion, as in other things, the Jewish women, as all of their sex in the ancient world, were obliged to be content with an inferior position. In the great temple at Jerusalem they were allowed to occupy only the second court: to the Court of Israel, where their male relatives worshipped, they could not penetrate. They had no occasion, however, to complain of lack of space, for in this Court of the Women there was room for over fifteen thousand persons; and, for their convenience, the priests had very considerately placed therein the treasury chests. It was here that the poor widow whom Christ eulogized cast in her "two mites." In this court also was Solomon's Porch, where the Master, recognizing no inequality, taught both sexes alike. In the synagogues, the women of Palestine were obliged to occupy as inconspicuous a position as possible, and on the way thither it was required of them that they should take the back and less frequented streets, in order that the minds of the men might not be diverted from sacred meditations by their presence. This bit of hypocritical phariseeism not only indicates the inferior plane which women were supposed to occupy, but also that, however honored they may have been as wives and mothers, they enjoyed no portent of that chivalry which afterward grew from and was fostered by Christianity.

The existence of the Jewish woman was by no means secluded. She was allowed to mingle freely in outdoor life. She accompanied her family on their journeys to the great festivals which were held in Jerusalem. Indeed, we read of Galilean women following Jesus into Judea, evidently unescorted by male relatives. Females also entertained mixed companies in their own homes. It is probable, however, that there was more freedom of movement among the lower-class women than was enjoyed by their sisters of high degree. While the former dwelt in mean and small houses, in which there was little possibility of seclusion, the latter had large and luxurious homes, with great interior courts and special apartments for their own use. The luxuriousness of these wealthy women rivalled that of Rome itself. We read of one Martha, the wife of a high priest, who, when she went to the temple, had carpets laid from her house to the door of the temple. Upon the poorer women were imposed the hardships of labor: "two women grinding at the mill" was a common sight in every home.

In that momentous drama the leading figure of which was the Son of Man, women of greatly varying character and position played a part. There were Herodias, and Procla, the wife of Pilate: these were the highest ladies in the land; there were Martha of Bethany, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, representing the middle class; Mary, the mother of Jesus, from among the poor; and Mary of Magdala, from among a class of women who were numerous in Palestine, one of whom the Gospel designates as "a woman who was a sinner."

Of the two first mentioned little may be said in this connection, as they were far from being Christian women, though the wife of Pilate earned for herself the respect of all succeeding generations by pleading for the life of Jesus.

Herodias is connected with this story only on account of the cruel determination with which she sought and compassed the death of John the Baptist. The granddaughter of Herod the Great, she inherited not only his impetuous ambition, but also his ferocity. She had been married to Herod Philip, her uncle. This son of the first Herod was a wealthy private resident of Jerusalem; but Herodias could not be content to stand aside as a mere spectator of the brilliant game of governing. So she seized the opportunity which the presence of Antipas in her house, by her husband's hospitality, gave her to begin an intrigue, which ended in her marital union with the tetrarch. By this conduct she trampled on Jewish law and offended the people. Not that the severing of the marriage bonds was a thing unusual among the Jews; indeed, the facilities for divorce were exceedingly liberal. A man could put away his wife for the most trifling cause. "If anyone," said the rabbis, "see a woman handsomer than his wife, he may dismiss his wife and marry that woman." It was considered ample cause for divorce if a wife went out without her veil. The disciples of Hillel even went so far as to hold that if a woman spoiled her husband's dinner, by burning or over salting it, sufficient cause was given him, if he so chose, to put her away. This is the point of the question with which the Pharisees came to try Christ. "Is it lawful," said they, "for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" So, then, that which shocked the Jews and caused them to agree with John in his denunciation of Herod was not that the latter divorced his first wife, the daughter of Aretas, but that he took Herodias, she not having been put away by her husband, Philip. Here is some very remarkable moral sophistry. It would have been right, in the sight of Jewish law, for Herod and Philip to have exchanged wives, after legally divorcing them for any cause

which might have seemed to them proper; but there was no law, nor was there any conceivable wrong, which could give Herodias the right to leave her husband of her own free will. Women could not gain divorce. So, according to the Jewish idea, the fault of Herod consisted solely in the fact that Philip had not yet seen fit to release Herodias. Whether or not John the Baptist concurred with the ideas of his time on this subject we do not know; but the One who came after him put marriage on a far higher basis and restricted divorce to its essential cause.

Herodias plotted and achieved John's destruction perhaps as much on account of her fear of the effect of his influence upon Herod's ambitious projects as because of her resentment at his charges against herself. She was determined that Herod should be a king, like her brother Agrippa; but the latter was a great favorite with Caligula, and when his letters were presented to the emperor at the same time that Herod appeared, in obedience to the importunities of his wife, to press his suit, the husband of Herodias was deposed and exiled to Lyons. The only praiseworthy thing that Herodias ever did, so far as is known, was on this occasion. Caligula wished to allow her to retain her own fortune, and told her that "it was her brother who prevented her being put under the same calamity with her husband." This was her reply: "Thou, indeed, O emperor, actest after a magnificent manner, and as becomes thyself in what thou offerest me; but the kindness which I have for my husband hinders me from partaking of the favor of thy gift; for it is not just that I, who have been made a partner in his prosperity, should forsake him in his misfortunes." Thereupon Caligula sent her into banishment with Herod, and gave her estate to Agrippa.

Our curiosity is greatly aroused, but in no degree satisfied, regarding another woman who dwelt at Jerusalem in

the time of Christ. Pilate, the Roman procurator, had taken his wife with him to Judea. Tradition has it that she there became a proselyte to the Jewish faith. This is by no means unlikely, for throughout the Roman world were found women who had become converts to the religion of Zion; Josephus, by his own experience, shows that at a later date even Poppæa, the wife of Nero, was extremely partial to the Jews. The Greek Church even goes further, and places Procla in its calendar of saints. Though there is no evidence extant of her having become a Christian, it need not be considered a thing impossible; indeed, it is extremely reasonable to suppose that, having endeavored to save the life of Jesus, the wonderful religious movement which succeeded His death could not have been unknown or without interest to Procla. At any rate, certain it is that she had some knowledge of Jesus, that she was to no small degree disposed in his favor, and that Pilate's wish to balk the priests in their designs on Christ's life was, in a large measure, the result of his wife's influence. But Pilate was caught with the argument that to save the Prisoner would be a sign of disloyalty to Cæsar. This incident is the most prominent instance that history affords of the unwisdom of opposing masculine ratiocinations to feminine moral intuitions.

We now turn to those women of the Gospels who were the acknowledged friends of Jesus and of the founders of Christianity. The central figure is, of course, the Blessed Mother—Mary, honored by Christians above all the daughters of the earth and adored by many millions as the Queen of Heaven; and yet how inadequate, how meagre is the veritable knowledge we possess of this immortal woman! Never has human imagination so magnificently triumphed as in the evolution of the concept of the Blessed Virgin; never has fond adoration built so marvellous an

ideal upon so scanty a foundation of assured reality. A moderate-sized page would contain all that is vouchsafed regarding her in the Gospels, yet who ever disputed the claim for Mary that she is the highest representative of all that is purest and most beautiful in womanhood. This much is not a dogma of any church, but a universal feeling. This prevailing conception of the character of Mary has grown out of the conviction of what must have been the moral worth of the one fitted to bear and rear the Son of Man; and it has also resulted to a large degree from that strong human love for motherhood which seeks a perfect example on which to expend itself. The Blessed Virgin is womanhood idealized. She is the personification of all feminine beauty, both of soul and body; she is the perfect expression of the poet's highest inspiration and the artist's noblest dream. We cannot help wishing, however, that more were known of the home life of Mary; the desire to place the beautiful figure of the Representative Mother in the varied settings of common feminine life is irresistible, but this can only be done by means of what little we know of the manners and customs of her people and time.

As has been said, the sources of information about the Mother of Jesus are the four Gospels. In addition to these, there are the apocryphal Christian writings; but these are of too late origin and contain too many manifestly absurd accounts to warrant credence, except where they are corroborated by the Evangelists. The latter say nothing whatever of Mary's direct parentage. She was an offspring of the regal line, that of David; for though it is most probable that the puzzling genealogies of Matthew and Luke are those of her husband, Joseph, there are many reasons for believing that he and Mary were blood relations. Their home was at Nazareth, a beautiful

hill town of Galilee, noted for the comeliness of its women. At the end of the sixth century, Antoninus Martyr remarked that the Jewish women of Nazareth were not only fairer but also more affable to Gentiles than were the other women of Palestine, and modern travellers inform us that both these characteristics are still preserved. Geikie says: "The free air of their mountain home seems to have had its effect on the people of Nazareth. Its bright-eyed, happy children and comely women strike the traveller, and even their dress differs from that of other parts. . . . That of the women usually consists of nothing but a long blue garment tied in round the waist, a bonnet of red cloth, decorated with an edging or roll of silver coins, bordering the forehead and extending to the ears, reminding one of the crescent-shaped female head-dress worn by some of the Egyptian priestesses. Over this, a veil or shawl of coarse white cotton is thrown, which hangs down to the waist, serving to cover the mouth, while the bosom is left exposed, for Eastern and Western ideas of decorum differ in some things. . . . In a country where nothing changes, through age after age, the dress of to-day is very likely, in most respects, the same as it was two thousand years ago, though the prevailing color of the Hebrew dress, at least in the better classes, was the natural white of the materials employed, which the fuller made even whiter."

We are not informed on the authority of the Gospels as to Mary's age when she was espoused to Joseph the carpenter. The apocryphal *Gospel of Mary* states that she was fourteen, while the *Protevangelion* places her age at twelve, which is in accordance with the custom of the East, where girls mature much earlier than with us. The betrothal consisted of mutual promises and the exchange of gifts in the presence of chosen witnesses, followed by

the engaged couple ceremonially tasting of the same cup of wine, and was ended with a benediction pronounced by a priest or a rabbi. After these solemn espousals the relation between Mary and Joseph was as sacred as though marriage had really taken place; the only difference was that the couple did not yet live together. The woman was not allowed to withdraw from the contract, and the man could not fail to fulfil his promise unless he gave her a formal bill of divorcement for cause, as in the case of marriage; the laws relating to adultery were also applicable. Yet many months might intervene between the date of the betrothal and that of the marriage.

What took place during this interval in the life of the Virgin is a mystery which it would be a vain attempt to investigate. If it be judged of from a purely rationalistic standpoint, there are no historical and no scientific data which will enable us to do otherwise than simply discredit the accounts of the Nativity, as they are given by Matthew and Luke. On the other hand, if the narrative of Christ's birth is accepted with that reverent faith which has endured through nineteen centuries of Christendom, and has been and still is held by men of unrivalled intellect, there is nothing more to be said than the language of worship and wonder. We may well regret that John and Mark, or at least one of the epistolary writers, did not corroborate the testimony of the two first-named Evangelists; the scant importance Mary seems to have acquired in the Apostolic Church may appear inconsistent with the stupendous nature of her experiences; yet here is no subject for vain reasoning; we stand before a mystery which belongs wholly to the realm of faith. The science of Christology demands the acceptance of this supernatural event. But it is as little within the province of this book to defend the faith as it is to apply

the canons of Higher Criticism to the writings of the New Testament.

In the picture which the Scriptures give us of Mary there is no touch so human as that which represents her, at the first intimation of the coming of her Son, hastening southward to confer with her cousin Elisabeth. To a woman must the news first be whispered, before it gains the observation of the man to whom she is espoused; and not to the gossips of Nazareth, but to her holy and sober-minded kinswoman alone could Mary impart her hopes and her fears. Poetic expression was a Jewish woman's birthright; Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, and Judith, each had magnified the Lord with a song; let Mary also, in the assurance that her Offspring is to be the Messiah long foretold, voice the exultation of her soul in like manner. "Behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed. . . . He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

Augustus Cæsar sent forth an edict that all the world should be taxed. It was an act of which we should have known little and thought less, had it not marked the occasion of the birth of Him to whom the world will never cease to pay a tribute of homage.

In the birth of Jesus, the mystery of motherhood is glorified, nay, almost deified. Mankind needed that also. The pagan world had always sought to satisfy feelings which are deep rooted in the human heart by conceiving of maternity under the form of a divine personality. A religion which does not, in some way, recognize in its object the loving kindness and the painful solicitude of the mother heart cannot survive. Mary is a symbol of that natural tender reverence and supreme confidence which motherhood inspires. The shepherds knelt before her in the stable which the necessities of poverty made

the scene of her lying-in, for the inestimable graces of the mother depend not upon wealth or earthly splendor. The Wise Men from the East brought their gifts, for there is no greater wisdom than that which pays its homage before the babe at its mother's breast.

In the one great experience of maternity Mary's greatness ends, so far as the records show. Did she settle down to all appearances as an ordinary Nazareth housewife? Did she bear to Joseph other children? To many, the latter question seems like sacrilege; and yet there is nothing of authority written to the contrary.

Tradition has it that Joseph died early in their married life. Mary then was dependent for her support upon her Son's labors. Did He refrain from His chief calling until He was thirty years of age in order that He might know not only common toil but also filial duty in the support of the mother? Was it to consult on some family business that His mother and His brethren stood outside the house where He was teaching, being desirous to speak with Him? All these questions are to us unanswerable; but it surely does not detract from the sacredness of the pictures to infuse into it every possible element of human interest.

The Gospels turn their light once more, and for the last time, on Mary. It reveals her at the foot of the Cross. Each of the Synoptists tells us that many women followed Him out of Galilee; by John alone is Mary mentioned as being present at the Crucifixion. "When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, 'Woman, behold thy son.' Then saith he to the disciple, 'Behold thy mother.' And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." Why was this so if Mary had other living sons? John, who it is probable was her own sister's son, would immediately lead the Mother away from the terrible scene, where a

sword was also piercing her own soul, to a place where she could await the announcement of the end. The fact that there is no record of an appearance to Mary after the Resurrection must be accounted for by the belief that her faith did not need this, in its assurance that death could not conquer her divine Son.

Nevertheless, the paucity of the reference to Mary in the New Testament, after the Nativity, is perplexing. For the other legends concerning her history and character, which have been cherished by a very large portion of Christendom, we are wholly indebted to what are known as the Apocryphal Gospels. These consist of writings which were extant, in some cases, before the present New Testament books were selected as being alone authentic, but were not deemed of sufficient worth to be included in the canon. There is *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary*. In the very early ages this book was supposed to be the work of Saint Matthew. Many ancient Christians believed it to be authentic and genuine, and Jerome, who lived in the fourth century, quotes it entire. Another book, of the same description, known as the *Protevangelion* of Saint James, is mentioned by writers equally ancient. Then there is the *Gospel of the Infancy*. This, we are told, was accepted by the Gnostic Christians as early as the second century; but it is full of manifest absurdities, outrageous even to the most compliant credulity. A fair sample of its stories—not including the miraculous, which are exceedingly puerile—is the one which relates that at the circumcision of Jesus an old Hebrew woman took the part that was severed "and preserved it in an alabaster-box of old oil of spikenard. And she had a son who was a druggist, to whom she said, 'Take heed thou sell not this alabaster-box of spikenard-ointment, although thou shouldst be offered three hundred pence for it.' Now this is that

alabaster-box which Mary the sinner procured, and poured forth the ointment out of it upon the head and the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, and wiped it off with the hairs of her head."

The *Gospel of Mary* has been made the basis of much serious belief in regard to the Blessed Virgin, and especially have Christian artists drawn from its pages suggestions for their subjects. We will summarize the account it gives of the Mother of Jesus. "The blessed and ever glorious Virgin Mary, sprung from the royal race and family of David, was born in the city of Nazareth, and educated at Jerusalem, in the temple of the Lord. Her father's name was Joachim, and her mother's Anna. The family of her father was of Galilee and the city of Nazareth. The family of her mother was of Bethlehem. Their lives were plain and right in the sight of the Lord." Nevertheless, for twenty years they suffered what, in the eyes of the Jews, was one of the greatest of misfortunes: they were childless. Joachim is taunted with this fact by Issachar, the high priest. The good man, being much confounded with the shame of such reproach, retired to the shepherds who were with the cattle in their pastures; for he was not inclined to return home, lest his neighbors, who were present and heard all this from the high-priest, should publicly reproach him in the same manner. Thereupon an angel appears to him and informs him that his wife Anna shall bring forth a daughter, and that they shall call her Mary. "She shall, according to your vow, be devoted to the Lord from her infancy, and be filled with the Holy Ghost from her mother's womb; she shall neither eat nor drink anything that is unclean, nor shall her conversation be without among the common people, but in the temple of the Lord; that so she may not fall under any slander or suspicion of anything that is bad." The angel also appears to Anna,

giving her the like information. "So Anna conceived, and brought forth a daughter, and, according to the angel's command, the parents did call her name Mary.

"And when three years were expired, and the time of her weaning complete, they brought the Virgin to the temple of the Lord with offerings. And there were about the temple, according to the fifteen Psalms of degrees, fifteen stairs to ascend. For the temple being built on a mountain, the altar of burnt-offering, which was without, could not be come near but by stairs; the parents of the blessed Virgin and infant Mary put her upon one of these stairs; but while they were putting off their clothes, in which they had travelled, and according to custom putting on some that were more neat and clean, in the mean time the Virgin of the Lord in such a manner went up all the stairs one after another, without the help of any to lead or lift her, that anyone would have judged from hence that she was of perfect age. Thus the Lord did, in the infancy of his Virgin, work this extraordinary work, and evidence by this miracle how great she was like to be hereafter. But the parents having offered up their sacrifice, according to the custom of the law, and perfected their vow, left the Virgin, with other virgins in the apartments of the temple, who were to be brought up there, and they returned home."

Mary, we are told, was ministered unto by angels until her fourteenth year, and preserved from all suspicion of evil, so that "all good persons, who were acquainted with her, admired her life and conversation. At that time the high-priest made a public order, that all the virgins who had public settlements in the temple, and were come to this age, should return home; and as they were now of a proper maturity, should, according to the custom of their country, endeavor to be married." This, Mary refuses to

do, she having vowed her virginity to the Lord. Then the high priest convenes a meeting of the chief persons of Jerusalem to seek counsel from Heaven in this matter. A voice from the mercy-seat directs that all the men of the family of David who were marriageable and not married should bring their staves to the altar, "and out of whatsoever person's staff after it was brought, a flower should bud forth, and on the top of it the Spirit of the Lord should sit in the appearance of a dove, he should be the man to whom the Virgin should be given and be betrothed."

Among the rest there was a man named Joseph, of the house and family of David, and a person very far advanced in years, who drew back his staff, when everyone besides presented his. Joseph, however, was clearly pointed out, in the manner described, as being the chosen man. "Accordingly, the usual ceremonies of betrothing being over, he returned to his own city of Bethlehem, to set his house in order, and make the needful provisions for the marriage. But the Virgin Mary, with seven other virgins of the same age, who had been weaned at the same time, and who had been appointed to attend her by the priest, returned to her parents' house in Galilee." Then follows an account of the Annunciation, similar to that given by Saint Luke, but somewhat elaborated. "Then Mary, stretching forth her hands, and lifting her eyes to heaven, said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be unto me according to thy word."

In the *Protevangelion* all this is recited, but at greater length. It is there said of Mary that, while she lived in the temple, "all the house of Israel loved her." It is related also of her that she was chosen by the priests to weave the purple veil for the temple. In this writing, Mary is described as having received the announcement

of the angel as she went to the spring to draw water. There is also a curious passage in which Joseph is represented as telling the experiences which came to him as he went to seek a midwife in the village of Bethlehem. "As I was going," he says, "I looked up into the air, and I saw the clouds astonished, and the fowls of the air stopping in the midst of their flight. And I looked down toward the earth, and saw a table spread, and working people sitting around it, but their hands were upon the table, and they did not move to eat. They who had meat in their mouths did not eat. They who lifted their hands up to their heads did not draw them back; and they who lifted them up to their mouths did not put anything in; but all their faces were fixed upwards. And I beheld the sheep dispersed, and yet the sheep stood still. And the shepherd lifted up his hand to smite them, and his hand continued up. And I looked unto a river, and saw the kids with their mouths close to the water, and touching it, but they did not drink."

Notwithstanding all that is said in these ancient writings in the attempt to do her honor, we must conclude that the glory of the halo which beautifies the head of the real Mary is derived by reflection from the moral splendor of her Son. Of what intrinsic greatness of soul she was possessed it is difficult for us to surmise from the slight attention given to her in the Gospels. Yet she rightly holds her position as woman idealized. We need such a poetic creation as Mary; and her place at the head of all the daughters of earth is the more secure and effective because her figure in authentic history is but a shadowy outline. The ideal woman whom all mankind loves and reverences as Virgin, Mother, and Saint, is objectified by concentrating in Mary of Nazareth all possible feminine grace, beauty, and purity.

Let us turn now to another Mary who, in the Gospel history, achieved a fame hardly less renowned than that of her great namesake: Mary of Magdala, out of whom Christ cast seven devils. Magdala was a town on the lake of Galilee, as notorious for its profligacy as it was famous for its wealth, derived from the manufacture of dyes. Mary's affliction was doubtless as much of a moral as of a mental nature; it may refer to the abandonment of immoral excess into which she was driven by her passionate nature. The Jews at the time of Christ were wont to ascribe every form of evil, physical and also spiritual, to the agency of demons, who were supposed to have the power of taking possession of human beings as a habitation. The tradition of the Church has always identified Mary Magdalene with the woman who, in Simon's house, anointed Christ's feet with ointment, after washing them with her tears. Still, it must be confessed that there is no certain foundation for this belief. On this point, Archdeacon Farrar says: "The Talmudists have much to say respecting her—her wealth, her extreme beauty, her braided locks, her shameless profligacy, her husband Pappus, and her paramour Pandera; but all that we really know of the Magdalene from Scripture is that enthusiasm of devotion and gratitude which attached her, heart and soul, to her Saviour's service. In the chapter of Saint Luke which follows the account of her anointing the Lord's feet in the Pharisee's house she is mentioned first among the women who accompanied Jesus in his wanderings, and ministered to him of their substance; and it may be that in the narrative of the incident at Simon's house her name was suppressed, out of that delicate consideration which, in other passages, makes the Evangelist suppress the original condition of Matthew."

Mary Magdalene's great part in the Gospel history was at the Resurrection. To her ardent love and intense imagination, enabling her to visualize Him who, though dead, she could not relinquish, rationalists ascribe the inception of the doctrine of the Resurrection. According to this theory, as Mary of Nazareth brought Jesus into the world, so through Mary of Magdala His risen Spirit was born into the Church. But this is not the faith of Christendom; nor can the testimony of the Gospels be reasonably disposed of in this manner. To the Magdalene was given the supreme honor of receiving the first greeting of her risen Lord; and her testimony is the chief cornerstone of the most comforting doctrine of Christianity.

The gospel narrative gives a prominent place to woman, —as a believer in Christ, as His devoted follower and constant ministrant, and also as a faithful and unswerving witness to His wondrous works. The ready faith of the Gospel women is illustrated by many narratives of miracles wrought in their behalf. The faith of Martha and Mary was rewarded by the restoration to life of their brother Lazarus. There was the woman whom physicians could not cure, yet her faith led her to touch the hem of the Master's garment and she was made whole. To the widow of Nain, as she accompanied the dead body of her son to its sepulchre, was given that son restored to life. The despised Syrophenician woman proved her humility and her faith, and her daughter was made whole. Christ's commiseration was manifested notably to woman, though not exclusively, as we see in the case of the raising of the daughter of Jairus in answer to the father's faith. In the life of Christ, the supernal event in the world's history, woman's influence and activity were not less than man's; but, unlike his, her part was marked by unalloyed purity, magnanimity, and faithfulness.

Chapter II

The Women of the Apostolic Age

II

THE WOMEN OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

THE leaven of Christianity worked speedily and powerfully in raising woman to a position of greater honor in the estimation of the adherents of the new religion. In regard to mental and spiritual relations, it put her at once upon an equal footing with men, which was an entirely new development in human thought. We have seen how, even in Judaism,—the purest religion and the highest moral system known to the world previous to the coming of Christ,—woman held an inferior position and was debarred from many of its privileges, though not from its moral responsibilities. According to the Levitical code, when a man made an offering of any person of his family to the Lord, the value of a male was estimated at fifty shekels, while that of the female was put at thirty shekels; and, as in all cases where an arbitrary comparison is instituted between men and women, this computation was independent of the possession or lack of personal excellences. The mere undeveloped manhood in an otherwise worthless individual gave him, in Jewish estimation, a two-fifths superiority over the noblest woman. The very stupidity of this is an indication that sex can hardly have been designed by the Creator as a basis on which to found the right to the majority either of the duties or the privileges of human life. Under the new dispensation Paul

says: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek; there can be neither bond nor free; there can be no male and female: for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus." That the Apostle forbade women from taking part in the public ministrations in the congregation is still regarded, by the majority of people, as being harmonious with the natural fitness of things; and in those times at least, when the education of women was so terribly neglected, it was a measure absolutely necessary to the preservation of decency.

Of the new life opened to women in Christianity, Renan truly says: "The women were naturally drawn toward a community in which the weak were surrounded by so many guarantees." Their position in the society was then humble and precarious; the widow in particular, despite several protective laws, was the most often abandoned to misery, and the least respected. Many of the doctors advocated the not giving of any religious education to women. The Talmud placed in the same category with the pests of the world the gossiping and inquisitive widow, who passed her life in chattering with her neighbors, and the virgin who wasted her time in praying. The new religion created for these disinherited unfortunates an honorable and sure asylum. Some women held most important places in the Church, and their houses served as places of meeting. As for those women who had no houses, they were formed into a species of order, or feminine presbyterial body, which also comprised virgins, who played so capital a rôle in the collection of alms. Institutions which are regarded as the later fruit of Christianity—congregations of women, nuns, and sisters of charity—were its first creations, the basis of its official strength, the most perfect expression of its spirit.

The Christian Church is described, as it existed in the earliest germ, in the fourteenth verse of the first chapter

of Acts: "These (the eleven Apostles) all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." The women referred to were those faithful ones who followed Jesus from Galilee and ministered to him of their substance; those who went early to the tomb on Easter morning, to perform the last offices of affection, and found the sepulchre empty: Mary Magdalene, Salome the mother of John and James, Joanna, and "the other Mary." But these are no more mentioned by name in the New Testament; nor is even the mother of Jesus again referred to, except in that impersonal manner in which Saint Paul speaks of Christ as "born of a woman." A large and prominent place was held by women in the life of Jesus, but those same women are not accorded a corresponding importance in the history of the founding of the Church. It is a new set of names that we encounter in Apostolic history; converts from heathendom, and those who labored with the Apostle to the Gentiles. The records allow the women of the Gospels to fall into obscurity; but they will never pass out of human memory as a galaxy which surrounded the Bright and Morning Star.

As yet the Church had not developed an organization, except that the Twelve—the place of Judas having been filled—were recognized as leaders by virtue of their having been chosen by Christ. The rest, women equally with men, were simply believers. Even the Apostles had no plan, no foresight of future development. Officers were created only as conditions arose which required them. At first the Church was simply a communistic family, bound together in holy love by a common enthusiasm. The ordinary conventions of society were for the time suspended; men and women lived together in the free communion of a great family. Their time was almost wholly spent in

prayer and the work of conversion; the ordinary avocations of life were almost entirely discontinued. The community was supported out of a common stock, which was daily replenished by the proceeds of the sale of the possessions of converts. No one called his own anything that he had; they held all in common. Their number was too great for a common table, but they met in large parties at each other's houses, none suffering disparagement on account of condition or sex. Each evening meal was a commemoration of the Last Supper of Christ with his disciples. This briefly enduring prototype of a perfect human society contained in itself the prophecy of all that Christianity would do for woman through all the slow development of the ages. In the community of the Jerusalem Christians she was neither a slave nor a subordinate. The burden of the daily provision, which still falls so heavily on the vast majority of women, was here rendered extremely light, for all helped each and each helped all. Equal fellowship also in the great spiritual possession caused all the marks of woman's inferiority to vanish, and the sexes freely mingled in a pure and noble companionship.

But this perfect type of society was not destined long to endure. It appeared only for a brief season, barely sufficient to intimate what human life might be, if governed by the Spirit of Jesus; and then a woman was accessory to a deed which showed that the ideal was as yet far too high for a practical and prudent world. Sapphira and Ananias had sold their possession and had laid a part of the price at the Apostles' feet, under the pretence that they were devoting their all. "Tell me," said Saint Peter, "did ye sell the land for so much?" "Yes," answered Sapphira, faithful to the conspiracy she had entered into with her husband, "that was the amount." "Ye have agreed together to lie unto God," said the Apostle. "The feet

of them who have buried thy husband are at the door; they shall carry thee out also." And she immediately "gave up the ghost." And the young men carried her out and buried her by her husband. The description of the burying seems to indicate that it was done as quietly as possible, probably so as not to attract the attention of the people. But great fear of the power of the Apostles seized those who heard the rumor of these happenings. It is not a pleasant story, and it jars on a conscience in which the memory of the Gospel teaching is fresh and vivid. Yet the Church was not so strong in itself but that it needed to resort to drastic measures in order to protect itself from covetous hypocrisy within, more to be feared than violent persecution from without. As to the pathological cause of the death of Sapphira and her husband, no explanation is given. In the market place of a town in Wiltshire, England, there is a remarkable stone monument, which was erected by the corporation to commemorate a "judgment" which took place on the spot many years ago. According to the lengthy inscription engraved upon the column, three women had agreed to purchase a certain quantity of flour, each contributing her share of the price. A dispute arose, owing to one having declared that she had paid her part, though the amount could not be accounted for. Being accused of trying to cheat, she exclaimed that she wished she might fall dead if she were not telling the truth. She immediately fell to the ground and expired, whereupon the money was found upon her person. Those who caused the inscription to be written for the warning of future marketers believed it to be a "judgment." Doubtless it was the effect of excitement upon a pathological condition of the heart. The comparison between this case and that of Sapphira and Ananias is weakened only by the strange fact that husband and wife should, on

the same day, meet death in this remarkable manner. It is perhaps worthy of notice that Herodias and Sapphira are the only women mentioned by name in the New Testament against whom anything discreditable is charged.

As the number of believers increased in Jerusalem, trouble was encountered in regard to the daily provision. The communistic plan of living was by no means rigidly insisted upon, as is shown by the fact that Peter admits that Ananias was not obliged to make an offering of the whole or even of a part of the price of his possession. Converts were added too rapidly, and their organization was too loose for the perfecting of any economical system. We see, however, the congregation making careful provision for the indigent by a daily distribution.

There were in Jerusalem many Hellenistic Jews; that is, those who were reared in foreign countries or were born of parents so reared. The Palestinian Jew affected a distinct superiority over these. This seems to have been allowed to result in a slight showing of ill will between the native and foreign-born Jews who accepted Christ. The latter found cause to complain that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution; this seems to indicate that the widows were supported out of the revenues of the Church, a fact which quickly resulted in their being considered in the service of the Church. We find the widows early mentioned in a sort of corporate capacity. In the account of the raising of Dorcas, who was probably herself of this condition of life, it is said that Peter called "the saints and the widows." From this narrative we are led to infer that the manufacture of garments for the poor was recognized as the contribution of these women to the corporate activity of the Church. It was the inception of a distinctly female order in the Christian ministry.

In order that there should be no cause for complaint on the ground mentioned above, the Apostles instructed the whole body of believers to select from their number seven men, to whom should be intrusted the charitable work of the Church. These men were not deacons, in the sense in which this term has come to be applied, nor are they thus termed anywhere in the Acts of the Apostles. The office remained, but the duties changed; after the breaking up of the Christian community in Jerusalem by persecution, these "deacons" devoted themselves to the more attractive work of preaching, and from this time the ministry of good works fell naturally into the hands of the women.

Very early in the history of the Church there came into existence an order of female deacons, or deaconesses. It is more particularly in the Gentile congregations planted by Paul that we find this institution. In his Epistle to the Romans, among many other matters of a personal interest, we find the Apostle saying: "I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, who is a deaconess of the church that is at Cenchreæ;" and he requests them to receive her worthily of the saints and to assist her in whatsoever matter she may have in hand, for that she "hath been a succorer of many, and of mine own self." It is extremely probable that Phœbe was the bearer of this letter to the Romans. She may have been travelling to the city on affairs of her own, or it may be that Paul is referring to some commission from the Church which had been imparted to her by word of mouth.

He also sends greeting to Tryphæna and Tryphosa, who, with Persis, were probably deaconesses serving the church at Rome. Euodias and Syntyche, who are mentioned in the Epistle to the Philippians, were, there is every reason to believe, in this same order of the ministry. The Apostle testifies to the earnest coöperation in his work for which

he is indebted to these two women; but from his exhortation that they "be of the same mind," we may infer that there was some disagreement among them. Absolute harmony was not always maintained, even among the saints of the early Church. Saintliness has never yet been able entirely to eradicate from human nature all that is unseemly; and it is more than likely that if it were only possible for us to gain an intimate and personal knowledge of the conditions which prevailed in the Apostolic Church, we should not be greatly discouraged by a comparison of those days with our own times. The glamour of extraordinary holiness which succeeding centuries have thrown over that age was not perceptible to Paul. The lapse of time is of itself sufficient to idealize, and even to apotheosize, remarkable personages who in reality were not without their weaknesses.

What were the precise duties of these female servants we do not know. In the uncrystallized organism of early Christianity it is likely that their field of activity was not closely defined. From the Apostle's rule we know that they did not take part in the public ministrations. "Let the women," says he, "keep silence in the churches." In his idea of Christianity, the family is the unit, with the man as the responsible head. "If they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church." And yet, in what he says in the eleventh chapter of his first Epistle to the Church at Corinth, he seems to admit that the women have the right both to pray and prophesy in the congregation. But it may be the Apostle is judging the question not as *per se,* but in accordance with the prevailing ideas of his time. He who was "all things to all men," in order to win them, concluded that it was the duty of women to keep silent rather than to arouse prejudice by

trampling on custom and thus endangering the success of the Gospel. The women of the Corinthian Church seem to have abandoned the traditions of their time and people in this respect and were in the habit of praying and prophesying in the congregation, and, moreover, without the customary veil. In regard to this last-mentioned departure, Paul is emphatic: "Every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoreth her head." "Judge ye among yourselves, is it seemly that a woman pray unto God unveiled?" On this subject Dr. McGiffert comments as follows: "The practice, which was so out of accord with the custom of the age, was evidently a result of the desire to put into practice Paul's principle that in Christ all differences of rank, station, sex, and age are done away. But Paul, in spite of his principle, opposed the practice. His opposition in the present case was doubtless due in part to traditional prejudice, in part to fear that so radical a departure from the common custom might bring disrepute upon the Church, and even promote disorder and licentiousness. But he found a basis for his opposition in the fact that by creation the woman was made subject to the man. Paul's use of such an argument from the natural order of things, when it was a fundamental principle with him that in the spiritual realm the natural is displaced and destroyed, must have sounded strange to the Corinthians; and Paul himself evidently felt the weakness of the argument and its inconsistency with his general principles, for he closed with an appeal to the custom of the churches: 'We have no such custom, neither have the churches of God,' therefore you have no right to adopt it. This was the most he could say. Evidently he was on uncertain ground."

Those same restrictive traditions, which prevented the deaconesses from taking part in public instruction or

ministering in the congregation, rendered their service imperatively necessary in many of the private activities of the Christian Church. They instructed female catechumens in the first principles of the new religion; they prepared them for baptism, and by their attendance disarmed inimical criticism when this sacrament was administered to women. To their hands was committed the ministry of mercy. They relieved the sick, instructed the orphans, consoled their sisters when in trouble, encouraged those who were condemned to martyrdom, and were the official embodiment of that characteristic fraternalism in the early Church which induced even their heathen enemies to exclaim: "How these Christians love."

It was not essential that a woman appointed to the office of a deaconess should be free to devote her whole time to the service of the Church. The two slave girls whom Pliny examined by torture upon the rack, and of whom he wrote to the Emperor Trajan, were very probably deaconesses. The order was composed of virgins who were tried and trained by a life of chastity and devotion and finally set apart to the office at the mature age of forty; or—and this was more commonly the case—of devout and sober-minded widows. In all probability Paul is referring to this order in that which he says of widows in his first letter to Timothy. There he writes: "Let none be enrolled as a widow under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she hath brought up children, if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work. But younger widows refuse: for when they have waxed wanton against Christ, they desire to marry; having condemnation, because they have rejected their first faith. And withal they learn also to be

idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I desire therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, rule the household, give none occasion to the adversary for reviling."

It is very remarkable that we seem to be left to infer from the above that the Apostle's indictment as to idling, tattling, gadding, and meddling is not to be charged against widows of over threescore.

Some students have held that the passage quoted above refers, not to deaconesses, but to a sort of female presbyters, like those who in the age succeeding that of the Apostles had a certain oversight over the widows and orphans of the congregations. On the other hand, Neander, the ecclesiastical historian, considers that the widows referred to were simply those who depended upon the Church for support and were consequently expected to manifest their worthiness by an example of special devoutness. But it is hardly believable that the Christian conscience would have refused such assistance to widows under sixty years of age or to those who had married the second time and had been again widowed. The probabilities are in favor of the view that all indigent and unfortunate Christian females were tenderly cared for by the charity which abounded in the Apostolic Church; but from those widows who had arrived at the age of sixty, and had shown themselves to be fitted for such an office by especial devotion to good works and by their approved trustworthiness, certain ones were enrolled for the service of the Church in the order of deaconesses.

Thus one of the earliest effects of Christianity was to introduce into its own society, in every city, an order of women who were looked up to with respect and veneration and intrusted with power and authority such as no

women had previously enjoyed, except in the almost unique instances of the vestals at Rome and the prophetesses among the ancient Germans. This could not fail to raise the whole sex in general respect, as well as in its own estimation.

As we have already noticed, the order of deaconesses did not consist exclusively of widows; it was, however, confined to those females who were free from all matrimonial obligations.

In the early Church, celibacy was held in exceeding high regard. Other qualifications being equal, virginity greatly increased a woman's reputation for sanctity. It is true that it is not until post-apostolic times that we find this condition of life exalted to the contradiction both of the laws of nature and the dictates of reason; but the foundation for the belief that the virgin life is superior to the married state was unquestionably laid by Paul himself. While he readily admits that marriage is honorable, he, at the same time, enthusiastically recommends celibacy to those who are able to persevere in continence. To the Corinthians he wrote: "He that giveth [a daughter] in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better." Whence arose this idea of the moral superiority of virginity? Surely not from Judaism; for among the Jews an unmarried woman was regarded as being to the greatest degree unblessed. Nor did it come from paganism; for though there were vestal devotees of the deities, the materialism which governed Greek and Roman religion entirely precluded any belief in a moral inferiority as resulting from the rightful intercourse of the sexes. In the rebound from the materialism of paganism, Christianity swung the thought of its adherents to the opposite extreme. The body was considered as hopelessly corrupt until regenerated by the resurrection. It is

a dead weight, retarding the development and the triumph of the spirit; its natural functions are tainted with evil and should be ignored and mortified so far as necessity will permit. The contemplation of the terrible licentiousness which characterized paganism gave a great bias to the views of the early Christians on this subject. The asceticism of celibacy seemed to them an easier way to escape the contamination of the world than that which led through the honorable path of married life.

In the seventh chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians he is wholly on the side of celibacy, though he was far too reasonable a man not to recognize the possibility of purity in marriage. "I say to the unmarried and to widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they have not continency, let them marry." It is very probable that the Apostle was a widower; for very few Jews of his time lived without marrying to the age which we may reasonably suppose he had attained before his conversion. He also says: "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful." We are to understand this mercy of which he speaks, not as referring to any deliverance from past marital encumbrances, but to the gift of faithfulness. Then he says that in view of the present distress from persecution, while it is good to be married, it is at least not less good to be single. "But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Yet such shall have tribulation in the flesh, and I would spare you." The tribulation he speaks of refers to the double portion of the "present distress" to which the married would be subject. His principal argument in favor of the unwedded state is that those who remain in it are enabled to devote themselves more completely to the service of God.

But there was no sign in the Apostolic Church of that morbid enthusiasm for virginity which fills the pages of the post-Nicene writers. We know that Peter was married; and there is evidence that he took his wife with him on his missionary journeys. "Have we not," says Paul, "power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" Tradition also informs us that Peter had a daughter whose name was Petronilla. The Apostle Philip had three daughters. Eusebius quotes from a letter written by Polycrates, who was bishop of the church at Ephesus, to Victor, Bishop of Rome, in which he says: "Philip, one of the twelve Apostles, sleeps in Hierapolis, and his two aged virgin daughters. Another of his daughters, who lived in the Holy Spirit, rests at Ephesus." Eusebius also in the same passage speaks, on the authority of Proculus, of "four prophesying daughters of Philip;" but it is most likely that he here confounds the deacon Philip with the apostle of the same name. From Acts we learn that the former had four daughters who prophesied and labored with their father at Cæsarea in Palestine.

Paul, in his Epistles, gives the names of about eighty friends and disciples; about twenty more are referred to in the Acts of the Apostles. Quite a large proportion of these are women, to whom the Apostle sends kindly greeting. His mention of them is always in the terms of respectful regard, and never merely complimentary or carefully polite. To many of these women he was deeply indebted for the care with which they had ministered to his comfort as he journeyed to and fro on his missionary tours; the names of some of them were treasured in his memory as those of zealous and valued fellow laborers in the cause of the Gospel. In both these relations, and also, perhaps, in that of his dearest female friend, stood

Priscilla, the wife of Aquila. She is the most frequently mentioned of all the women of the Apostolic Church, but always in conjunction with her husband. These people were Jews whose home was at Rome, but owing to the edict by which Claudius banished from the city all of their nationality they were living in Corinth when Paul first met them. In the Acts of the Apostles we learn that he was drawn to them because they were tent-makers like himself. "He abode with them and they wrought. . . . And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath." In this picture is seen the whole simple machinery of apostolic missions. Paul's first inquiry in Corinth is for a man of his own trade. He hears of Priscilla and Aquila, and at once finds with them a welcome both to lodging and also employment. Their work was such as could be readily carried on in the room which served for a lodging, and required but little in the way of implements, so that they could freely and easily move from one city to another. The work probably consisted in the making of tent cloth. This material was of goats' hair, which was plaited into strips, these being joined together. We see the three sitting together, and, with hands busy at the monotonous toil, which was not exacting in the matter of attention, reasoning of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. It was probably thus that the conversion of this husband and wife was brought about. Then on the Sabbath they would repair to the Jewish synagogue, where Paul would in public expound the new and strange doctrine. We can imagine how Priscilla would prepare for that week-end preaching. There would be no Jewess within her circle of acquaintances but would receive notice, with the admonition not to fail to be present. It is the inception of the "woman's auxiliary" in missionary work; but how simple was this first propaganda!

There was no board of managers either to hamper or advise; the workers were responsible only to the spirit that moved within them. There were no collections, nor any hindrance for lack of funds. Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla labored with their own hands, and they were free and enabled to go everywhere preaching the Gospel. The result of their work was that in Corinth, the city devoted to a lustful worship and exemplifying the worst corruptions of paganism, there was to be seen a band of men and women whose lives were glorified and purified by devotion to the teachings of Jesus.

It is noteworthy that the name of Priscilla is placed in the book of Acts, and also elsewhere, before that of her husband. Possibly this may indicate that she was of a higher rank or a nobler family; but we prefer to think that it is a tribute and a testimony to her zeal and greater prominence in the Church. It is not unlikely that Aquila was known as the husband of the successful female missionary Priscilla.

When the Apostle left Corinth these two fellow workers accompanied him as far as Ephesus. There he left them, with affectionate promises to return. Priscilla and Aquila settled in Ephesus for a time, and an opportunity was afforded them to perform a service for the Church, the effect of which it is impossible for us now to estimate. Apollos was a great name in the Apostolic Church. He came to have a large following among the Corinthian Christians; and he was probably the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This man, who is described as "eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures," was by Priscilla and her husband brought to a full knowledge of the Gospel.

When Paul was writing his first letter to the Corinthians he included greetings from Priscilla and Aquila, and also "from the church that is in their house," indicating

that the home of this couple was the meeting place of the Christians of Ephesus. He again mentions them in his letter to the Romans: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles." It is impossible to ascertain what was the instance here referred to of their devotion to him; perhaps it relates to the experience of the Apostle when he "fought with beasts at Ephesus."

There dwelt in the Macedonian city of Philippi a woman named Lydia, who had come there from Thyatira. She was engaged in the business of selling purple, whether the color itself or garments so dyed cannot be determined; but as women of that time were often employed in the manufacture of drugs and chemicals, it is likely that she prepared that dye which was so popular in the ancient Roman world. She had become a convert to Judaism. There seem to have been few Jews in Philippi, for it is evident that they had no synagogue, but were in the habit of meeting in the open air, on the banks of the river Strymon. Lydia, like many of the women of her time, was an earnest seeker after religious truth. When Paul came to Philippi, on the first Sabbath he went to the place of prayer, "and spake unto the women which resorted thither." This is a remarkable expression, inasmuch as it seems to indicate that only women were present, an extremely unusual congregation in the ancient world. But Paul, unlike the Jewish rabbis, did not deem a gathering of women unworthy of his most solicitous efforts. Lydia justified his exertions, for she became a convert to Christianity and was baptized with her whole household. She was a person of considerable means. The selling of purple was a very remunerative business. In gratitude for the new light which she had

received, and desirous to learn more of the Gospel, Lydia importuned the Apostle and his friends to take up their abode in her house, which, at least for the time, became the gathering place of the church in Philippi.

There is no possibility of overestimating the debt that Christianity owes to the fostering care of the early female converts. Its story has never been written from the standpoint of the women; if it could be so written, it would be seen that the labors of love which were accomplished by the feminine nature were no less fruitful than those which are recorded of the more public masculine activities.

While Paul was in Philippi, he encountered another woman, of a station and occupation very different from that of Lydia. She was a slave girl, who was in all probability what is known nowadays as a clairvoyant. The people believed that she was inspired by the Pythian Apollo. The narrative in the Acts of the Apostles says that she "was possessed of a spirit of divination," and that "she brought her masters much gain by soothsaying." There seems to have been a company or syndicate which, by means of the mysterious powers of this girl, traded upon the superstitions of the people. But Christianity was in opposition to this form of spiritualism. The girl, we are told, followed Paul and his friends and gave loud testimony to their divine mission. Very likely she heard the Apostle's preaching, and received an impression that resulted, owing to the peculiar condition of her mind, in an acute perception of the true character of the missionaries. Paul, however, had no desire to be introduced by any such medium as this. He exorcised the evil spirit which, according to Jewish notions, possessed the damsel; that is, by the influence of suggestion probably, he freed the girl from the thraldom of the abnormal condition of mind which had hitherto made her doubly a slave.

While we are engaged with the subject of Paul's female converts and acquaintances, it ought not to seem out of place if we give a little notice to that remarkable piece of literature which was popular in the early Church, and is known as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla.* It is certain that the main facts set forth in this legend were credited by such prominent ancient writers and theologians as Cyprian, Eusebius, Augustin, Gregory Nazianzin, Chrysostom, and Severus Sulpitius. Chrysostom especially gives a very clear indication of his belief in the story of Paul and Thecla. Basil of Seleucia wrote the history of Thecla in verse. Baronius, Archbishop Wake, and also the learned Grabe consider the facts as being authentic history. On the other hand, Tertullian says that it was forged by a presbyter of Asia, who confessed that he invented the account out of respect for Paul. And again, it is held that *The Acts of Paul and Thecla,* as we have it, is not the original book of the early Christians.

At any rate, even though it be nothing more than an imaginative creation, inasmuch as an account of Thecla and her companionship with Paul was extant early as the second century, as is proved by its being mentioned by Tertullian, it is surely worthy of attention for it shows, at a time so contiguous, how the age of the Apostles was pictured.

The scene is laid in the beginning at Iconium, whither Paul had fled from Antioch in Pisidia, as is related in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. There he is received by Onesiphorus and Lectra his wife. In their house the Apostle preaches. At a window in a nearby house sits the young maiden Thecla. She hears Paul's words, and is so captivated by his discourse that nothing can tear her away. As her mother says, she is there continuously, "like a spider's web fastened to the

window." At this rather long range the Gospel teaching takes effect in her heart, and she becomes a convert to Christianity. Her mother and Thamyris, her lover, endeavor by various means to divert her mind from these things; but it is all in vain. Thamyris, chagrined because the maiden no longer loves him, procures the arrest and imprisonment of Paul. Thecla, by bribing the jailers with her ear-rings and silver looking-glass, procures admittance to the prison, where she is still more firmly established in the faith.

On being found by her relatives, and refusing to marry Thamyris, she is ordered to be burned at the stake; but in a miraculous manner the fire is extinguished and Thecla is preserved. In the meantime, Paul, being banished from the city, takes refuge with Onesiphorus and his family, in a cave. There Thecla finds him, and begs to be allowed to accompany him in his travels. They go on to Antioch, where Alexander, a magistrate, falls in love with Thecla's beauty, and because she resists his advances she is condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts.

While she is waiting for the day on which her sentence is to be executed, Thecla implores the governor that she may be preserved from the unchaste designs of Alexander. To this end the governor gives her into the charge of Trifina, a noble matron of the city. The maiden gains not only the affection of Trifina, but also the sympathy of all the women who learn of her unfortunate fate. When the time comes for her to be thrown to the beasts, they refuse to attack her; and even though she is tied to wild bulls, she is miraculously saved. Alarmed by this wonder, the magistrate releases her, and she is adopted by Trifina.

"So Thecla went with Trifina, and was entertained there a few days, teaching her the word of the Lord, whereby many young women were converted; and there

was great joy in the family of Trifina. But Thecla longed to see Paul, and enquired and sent everywhere to find him; and when at length she was informed that he was at Myra, in Lycia, she took with her many young men and women; and putting on a girdle, and dressing herself in the habit of a man, she went to him to Myra, and there found Paul preaching the word of God.

"Then Paul took her, and led her to the house of Hermes; and Thecla related to Paul all that had befallen her in Antioch, insomuch that Paul exceedingly wondered, and all who heard were confirmed in the faith, and prayed for Trifina's happiness. Then Thecla arose, and said to Paul, 'I am going to Iconium.' Paul replied to her, 'Go, and teach the word of the Lord.' But Trifina had sent large sums of money to Paul, and also clothing by the hands of Thecla, for the relief of the poor."

After this no further mention is made of the Apostle. Thecla returns to Iconium, where she endeavors to convert her mother, but with no success. Taking up her abode in the cave where she first talked with Paul, she lives a virgin life and attains to a great age, doing many marvellous works and acquiring a great fame for sanctity.

This is a brief summary of the story which, whether it be fact or fancy, was devoutly believed by many of the earliest Fathers of the Church.

The Apostle to the Gentiles wrote: "Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." The Gospel of the Galilean Carpenter found an eager reception chiefly among the humble; the names of Lydia and Priscilla are those of workingwomen. Some of the names of women that Paul mentions in his Epistles are those of bondservants. His acquaintances in the houses of the great were among the menials. But Christianity ennobled those to whom it came. We know nothing of

Chloe of Corinth, of Claudia of Rome, of Euodias, of Syntyche, of Persis, of Phœbe, or of Damaris, except that they were among the first workers, the charter members of the Church; their names are engraved ineffaceably upon the foundations of the Faith. In an especial manner these women were working for the uplifting of their sex. They were pioneers who first ventured in that movement which inevitably brings enlargement of life for all womankind.

Yet Christianity was not wholly without its witnesses among the women of the higher ranks of society. If Acte, Nero's freedwoman, really were a Christian,—and it is strange that such a tradition should have arisen without a foundation in fact,—she could not have been without an influence upon the noble ladies with whom she was thrown into contact. Pomponia Græcina was brought to trial for embracing a foreign religion. This, in after ages, was believed to be Christianity; and it is certainly possible that Sienkievicz's splendid portrayal of her as a Christian matron is not wholly beside the mark.

A little later, in the time of Domitian, we know that Christianity invaded the imperial household. Domatilla, the niece of the emperor and the wife of the noble Flavius Clemens, was an avowed Christian, and for the sake of her faith was banished to the island of Pandataria, which had been made the prison of women of far different character.

Chapter III
The Era of Persecution

III

THE ERA OF PERSECUTION

PERSECUTION of the early Christians was preordained by some of the most prominent and essential qualities of human nature. Every new habit of thought is at first looked upon with dislike. Political and religious innovations are especially regarded with disfavor, because their promulgation necessarily involves the disadvantage of official adherents of prevailing systems, as well as the causing of that most disagreeable form of mental irritation which follows upon the breaking in upon the inertia of long-established prejudices.

Christianity was calculated to arouse determined opposition both from the political and also the religious forces of the empire. It was looked upon as a menace to the state and a dishonor to the gods. Rome was extremely tolerant of new religions, and its policy was to allow the people of its widely diversified conquests to retain their traditional forms and objects of worship; but the Roman deities must not know disrespect, and the most fair-minded emperors could comprehend no reason, except a treasonable one, why subjects should scruple to render obedience to the statutes commanding that divine honors should be paid to their imperial selves. But the very genius of Christianity necessitated absolute intolerance of other religious cults. The worshippers of Cybele or Isis had not

the least objection to paying their devotions to Vesta on the way to their own favorite temple; the women who besought Mars for the victory of their husbands, absent with the legions, freely offered incense before the statue of the emperor who sent forth those legions; but, for the Christians, to give Christ a place among the national deities was to do Him the greatest dishonor and to commit mortal sin, and to burn a handful of incense before the statue of the emperor was wicked idolatry and entailed the forfeiture of eternal salvation. Their missionary zeal compelled them to manifest the contempt in which they held the pagan gods, and thus the Christians laid themselves open to the charge of atheism as well as to that of treason. As Gibbon says: "By embracing the faith of the Gospel the Christians incurred the supposed guilt of an unnatural and unpardonable offence. They dissolved the sacred ties of custom and education, violated the religious institutions of their country, and presumptuously despised whatever their fathers had believed as true, or had reverenced as sacred." And inasmuch as the religion of the state was a part of the constitution of the state, their resolute rejection of it marked them, in the eyes of the rulers, as enemies of the state.

As the history of martyrdom is in almost every instance written by the friends of the sufferers, the motive of the persecutors is usually represented as wanton cruelty, while in fact it frequently was the case that the civil magistrate honestly deemed himself to be carrying out necessary precautions for the welfare of society. This assertion, which tends to the defence of the credit of human nature, can confidently be made in regard to most cases of official persecution. "Revere the gods in every way according to ancestral laws," said Mæcenas to Augustus, "and compel others so to revere them. Those, however, who

introduce anything foreign in this respect, hate and punish, not only for the sake of the gods,—want of reverence toward whom argues want of reverence toward everything else,—but because such, in that they introduce new divinities, mislead many also to adopt foreign laws. Thence come conspiracies and secret leagues which are in the highest degree opposed to monarchy." Julius Paulus laid down as a fundamental principle in Roman law: "Such as introduce new religions, whose bearing and nature are not understood, by which the minds of men are disquieted, should, if they are of the higher ranks, be transported; if of the lower, be punished with death." To a Roman the state was everything; individual liberty could only run in such courses as were parallel with the policy of the state. Those who retained a sincere belief in the ancient deities worshipped them as the patrons and guardians of the imperial destinies; the philosophical sceptics were no less inclined to insist upon that worship as a thing of political necessity, a means of binding the unintelligent in loyalty to the government.

In view of this, it is not to be wondered at that the contemptuous attitude which the Christians manifested to the ancient religions seemed to some of the wisest Romans to be nothing other than a stubborn fanaticism, concealing a hateful antagonism to society. Their meetings, which persecution necessarily made secret, were believed to be treasonable; their resolute isolation from the common amusements, which were deeply tainted with vice, caused them to be stigmatized as haters of mankind; the mystery which surrounded their worship provided a ready acceptance for the popular slander that in their secret gatherings the worst atrocities were perpetrated. To such men as Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, all this seemed a spreading evil to be determinedly stamped out.

On the other hand, it is true that the persecution of the Christians was taken advantage of to minister to the lust for spectacles of blood and agony which degraded the ancient world. There were the lions waiting; there were Christians who deserved death: why waste so good an opportunity to make a characteristic "Roman holiday."

We are appalled at the remembrance of civilized savagery which could delight in the sight of helpless women and tender maidens torn by beasts or writhing in the fire; and yet, almost equal cruelty, though not perpetrated in the same spirit, has been witnessed at so recent a date, and at the hands of "Christians," that we can hardly with a good grace reproach paganism for its atrocities of this kind. The potential "devilishness" which is in human nature is surely one of its prime mysteries.

In the literature of Christian martyrdom it is frequently assumed that there were ten general persecutions; but, as Mosheim says, this number is not verified by the ancient history of the Church. For if, by these persecutions, such only are meant as were singularly severe and universal throughout the Empire, then it is certain that these amount not to the number above mentioned. And if we take the provincial and less remarkable persecutions into the account, they far exceed it. The idea that the Church was to suffer ten great calamities arose from an interpretation of certain passages of Scripture, particularly one in Revelations.

In these days of gentler manners and easier faith, we are hardly more amazed at the cruelties which were enacted to abolish Christianity than we are astonished at the fortitude with which its adherents endured them. Never did punishment so signally fail as a deterrent. The Church grew most rapidly when to be a Christian almost certainly ensured martyrdom. It is a marvellous history, that of

the three hundred years of struggle between Christianity and paganism, in which all earthly considerations were abandoned for a conception of morality and for a faith in the existence of a life beyond the grave. The same spirit has always characterized Christianity, but never with such enduring persistence or with such success as in the early days.

In the records of this struggle it is abundantly shown that women were not spared, nor did they bear their part with less honor or courage than the men. It was in the Church as it has been in all history: while the government and the superior fame are awarded to one sex, equality in the opportunity and in the endurance of suffering are not denied to the other. The weaker sex has never been inferior in the ability to bear pain, or in the courage to go cheerfully to a martyr's death. It was no more common for women under the stress of torture to relinquish their faithfulness than for men. In the enthusiasm born of their hope in the Gospel, it was as much the wont of young virgins to meet the lion's eye without flinching as it was that of wise and venerable bishops.

The first principal persecution took place under Nero. There is no sign of any general edict by him against the Christians; so it is probable that the severities in this reign were confined to Rome. It is even doubtful if Nero cherished any purpose of suppressing Christianity. He found the Christians the most convenient victims for a charge of burning the city; so he satisfied the people by affixing the guilt to these hated sectaries, and at the same time amused the idle Roman populace by an unusual exhibition.

There is no mention of the names of those who suffered under the imperial actor; but there is no doubt there were many women in the number. Doubtless, some of those

women to whom Paul sent greeting and gave other mention in his Epistle suffered at this time. Though their names are not recorded in the chronicles of martyrdom, the blood of many of the Apostle's feminine friends at Rome helped to cement the foundation of the Church. Of all the tragedies witnessed by the City of the Seven Hills, in which women had taken a part, none was so significant as this. The wives and daughters of kings, consuls, and emperors had met death in the pursuit of ambitious projects. To them the fatal violence of tyrants meant hopeless failure; to these Christian women, who belonged to the lowest walks of society, it meant glorious success. When those died, their ambitions ended; when these perished, the faith which they so bravely confessed was only made stronger by their sufferings.

It is not unlikely that Poppæa, the wife of Nero, may have played an important part in this persecution. The Christians encountered as bitter opposition from the Jews as from the heathen. The fellow countrymen of Paul frequently succeeded in stirring up the animosity of the rulers against him and the other teachers of the new religion. While, as a rule, they themselves were extremely obnoxious to the Romans, it happened that at this time they had a powerful friend in the wife of the tyrant. Josephus relates how Poppæa befriended him, and he is enthusiastic in his praise of her "religious nature." So it may very likely have been—as the gifted author of *Quo Vadis?* describes—that the accusation of firing the city was fastened upon the Christians by the instrumentality of the Jews, and that Nero found a readier access to this welcome expedient through the counsel of Poppæa.

No description could be more vivid, or more trustworthy,—seeing that his prejudice is entirely against the

Christians,—than that given by Tacitus of the cruelties perpetrated by Nero upon the followers of Christ. "He inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men (we know from other evidence that there was no discrimination in regard to sex in these sufferings) who, under the vulgar appellation of Christians, were already branded with deserved infamy. They derived their name and origin from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius had suffered death by the sentence of Pontius Pilate. For a while this dire superstition was checked; but it again burst forth; and not only spread itself over Judæa, the first seat of this mischievous sect, but was even introduced into Rome, the common asylum which receives and protects whatever is impure, whatever is atrocious. The confessions of those who were seized discovered a great multitude of their accomplices, and they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city as for their hatred of human kind. They died in torments, and their torments were embittered by insult and derision. Some were nailed on crosses; others sewn up in skins of wild beasts, and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for the melancholy spectacle, which was accompanied with a horse-race, and honored with the presence of the emperor, who mingled with the populace in the dress and attitude of a charioteer. The guilt of the Christians deserved indeed the most exemplary punishment, but the public abhorrence was changed into commiseration, from the opinion that those unhappy wretches were sacrificed, not so much to the public welfare as to the cruelty of a jealous tyrant." Gibbon, commenting on this passage, adds the reflection that in the strange revolutions of history those same

gardens of Nero have become the site of the triumph and abuse of the persecuted religion. Where the first Roman followers of the Galilean Carpenter suffered for their confession, the successors of Peter exert a world-embracing hierarchical sway and a power far surpassing that of the greatest emperor.

No nation besides Rome ever systematically turned the torture of criminals into a popular pastime; but there the people had become so accustomed to the butchery of human beings in the public games that nothing was so welcome as a new device for heightening the effect of agonized death throes, except a large supply of judicially condemned men and women on whom to prove it. Nero had good reason to be well assured that he would not incur the displeasure of the people by condemning the Christians to the circus and the amphitheatre.

They were arrested in great numbers and crowded into a prison the loathsomeness of which was itself a horrible torture. A holiday was appointed so that the whole populace might be regaled by the sufferings of these men and women. The orgy of cruelty which ensued seems beyond the power of human nature to witness, much less to inflict. It is with great reason that the early Christians looked upon Nero as the Antichrist, the one representing in his nature the infinity of opposition to the Saviour. From none of those horrors were women exempt. Like the men they were crucified; they were covered with the skins of wild beasts and mangled by dogs; and, their garments being dipped in pitch, they were converted into living torches to light the gardens at night. Clement of Rome also tells us that many Christian women were made to play the part of the Danaids and of Dirce. It was the custom to give realistic representation to mythological subjects by compelling criminals to take the part of the victim of the

tragedy. Consequently, the women who represented Dirce were tied to the horns of a wild bull and dragged about the arena until they were dead. The well-known piece of ancient sculpture known as the Farnese Bull is the original tragedy pictured in stone. An inscription in Pompeii indicates that this exhibition was a common sight in the arena, women who were condemned being frequently put to death in this manner. No point likely to add to the effect of the scene was sacrificed to decency. The shame at being exposed naked, which would humiliate a Christian maiden even at the moment of impending death, simply afforded an element of jocularity to the tragedy in the eyes of that barbarous Roman multitude.

Doubtless the imperial author of these scenes took more pleasure in them than did any of his subjects. Renan thus pictures him: "As he was nearsighted, he used to put to his eye on such occasions a concave lens of 'emerald,' which served him as an eyeglass. He liked to exhibit his connoisseurship in matters of sculpture; it is said that he made brutal remarks on his mother's dead body, praising this point and criticising that. Living flesh quivering in a wild beast's jaw, or a poor shrinking girl, screening herself by a modest gesture, then tossed by a bull and cast in lifeless fragments on the gravel of the arena, must exhibit a play of form and color worthy of an artist-sense like his. Here he was, in the front row, on a low balcony, in a group of vestals and curule magistrates,—with his ill-favored countenance, his short sight, his blue eyes, his curled light-brown hair, his cruel mouth, his air like a big silly baby, at once cross and dull, open-mouthed, swollen with vanity, while brazen music throbbed in the air, turned to a bloody mist. He would, no doubt, inspect with a critic's eye the shrinking attitudes of these new Dirces; and I imagine he found a charm he had never

known before in the air of resignation with which these pure-hearted girls faced their hideous death."

Were these poor women, as they awaited in prison their doom, comforted and encouraged by the presence of the Apostle charged to "feed my lambs"? We do not know. But the firmness and constancy with which they endured trials so horrible even unto death bespeak the marvellous effect of the early enthusiasm of the Christian faith. These women were in the vanguard of the Christian army which first met the deadly force of heathen opposition; and because they did not flinch, but bore the pains of martyrdom for their faith, that faith ultimately triumphed and filled the world with its light. For more than two hundred years, however, the women who embraced this faith were to live in the daily dread of the terrible cry: "The Christians to the lions."

After the death of Nero, for a time the Church was, comparatively speaking, unmolested; though as Christianity was increasing in strength, it was regarded with greater hatred on the part of the general populace. Ugly stories began to be set afloat referring to the practices of this new sect. Later on it came to be believed that its adherents were in the habit of feasting, in their secret gatherings, on the body of a newborn child. This feast was said to be followed by an entertainment in which men and women abandoned themselves to the most abominable and promiscuous licentiousness. These charges, absurd as they were, served to obliterate any ray of pity which otherwise might have visited the minds of their persecutors.

In the year 81, Domitian, whom Tertullian describes as "of Nero's type in cruelty," succeeded Titus on the imperial throne. Influenced by his suspicion of all organizations, and also by the refusal of the Jewish people to pay the capitation tax which was designed to provide for the

finishing of the Capitol, he instituted a persecution of the Jews, which, for want of better knowledge on the part of the Romans, could not fail to involve the Christians. His own niece, Domitilla, who had been married to his cousin Flavius Clemens, was an avowed Christian, though up to this time the faith had made few converts among the high and mighty. Domitian banished her to the Island of Pandataria, and put to death her husband, probably on the same charge. They were accused rather vaguely of atheism and Jewish manners; but it seems probable that the Church has made no mistake in placing them among her first sufferers. This persecution by Domitian is counted as the second in the list of ten; but, though many besides Domitilla were put to death, it hardly seems possible that the persecution could have become very general, for only a few months after it began Domitian was assassinated by a freedman belonging to Domitilla, who, as Gibbon remarks, surely had not embraced the faith of his mistress.

The reign of the Emperor Trajan was, in many respects, marked by the greatest prosperity and the best administration that Rome ever enjoyed; but his strict government and close supervision, combined with his loyalty to the ancient traditions, made that reign an era of severity for the Christians. Pliny was governor of Bithynia and Pontus, and thence he wrote to the emperor informing him that the Christians were gaining headway everywhere, so much so that the temples of the gods were being forsaken by the people of all classes. He desired advice as to how he should proceed. By the application of torture to two maidservants who held the office of deaconesses in the local church he had elicited the information—for the learning of which, doubtless, torture was entirely unnecessary—that "the whole sum of their error

consisted in this, that they were wont, at certain times appointed, to meet before day, and to sing hymns to one Christ their God. They also agreed among themselves to abstain from all theft, murder, and adultery; to keep their faith, and to defraud no man: which done, they departed for that time, and afterwards resorted again to take a meal in companies together, both men and women, and yet without any act of evil."

To this Trajan replied that the Christians should not be sought after, nor should anonymous accusations be received; but when they were brought before the magistrate they should be punished. A most inconsistent decision; for, as Tertullian pointed out, if they deserved to be punished when caught, they ought also to be sought after as guilty.

In the legends of the martyrs there is an account of a widow named Symphrosa who, with her seven sons, suffered death by the command of Trajan. They refused to sacrifice to the gods at his behest. First, the mother was tortured by being hung up for some time in the temple of Hercules by the hair of the head, and then drowned; afterward, her sons were by various means tortured and put to death.

We now come to the time of the philosophic emperor, Marcus Aurelius. During the reign of his predecessor, Antoninus Pius, the Christians were generally left to practise and propagate their religion in peace. Consequently, the Gospel made rapid inroads upon paganism; so much so that the latter was stirred to a more bitter opposition than had ever before been instituted. At the first glance it appears a difficult problem in moral philosophy to explain how so wise and righteous a ruler as Marcus Aurelius could bring himself to persecute so cruelly an inoffensive people like the Christians. But in the first

place it must be remembered that ecclesiastic history of that time, as we have it, is very uncertain; in fact, it is greatly distorted and exaggerated. There are good reasons for believing that what is called a general persecution was confined largely to the one province of Gaul. Then it is very likely that the emperor knew but little of the character of the Christians or of the nature of their doctrines; that he held an unfavorable opinion of them is shown by his own words. It also seems to be the fact that he issued no new edict against them; but the rescript of Trajan was still in force, which was to the effect that Christians, when accused in legal form, and failing to recant, should be punished. Marcus Aurelius simply allowed this rule to be enforced by the magistrates. He saw in the Christians only stubborn recalcitrants against the established government. Whatever may have been the amount of the emperor's direct responsibility in the matter, during his reign the flame of persecution again burst out; and among many others, some women won lasting fame by the glorious constancy and courage of their martyrdom.

One of the most illustrious was Felicitas, a Roman lady of good family and the mother of seven sons. It was the policy of the magistrates not to punish unnecessarily, but to endeavor to win those who were accused to an acknowledged abandonment of their faith. In this case the judge deemed it the more efficacious method to proceed against the mother first, in the hope that in winning her to change her religion, he would have less trouble with her sons; but neither promises of freedom nor threats of total destruction of herself and her family could prevail. Then he caused each son to be brought before him separately, and endeavored both by menaces and persuasion to turn them from their allegiance. Felicitas, however,

had too thoroughly instilled into her sons' minds the principles upon which her own faith and courage were founded; they were unanimous in their steadfastness. The consequence was that the mother was doomed to see her offspring executed one by one; and at last, her resolution being invincible even before this terrible trial, Felicitas herself was beheaded.

The brunt of the persecution which took place in the reign of Marcus Aurelius was borne by the Christians of Gaul, particularly those of Lyons and Vienne. We possess a good description of these sufferings in a letter which has been preserved by Eusebius, and which was sent by the survivors of these devoted churches to their brethren in the other parts of the empire. "The greatness of the tribulation in this region," says the epistle, "and the fury of the heathen against the saints, and the sufferings of the blessed witnesses, we cannot recount accurately, nor indeed could they possibly be recorded. For with all his might the adversary fell upon us, giving us a foretaste of his unbridled activity at his future coming. He endeavored in every way to practise and exercise his servants against the servants of God, not only shutting us out from houses and baths and markets, but forbidding any of us to be seen in any place whatever. But the grace of God led the conflict against him, and delivered the weak, and set them as firm pillars, able through patience to endure all the wrath of the Evil One."

The letter goes on to relate how the heathen servants of many of the Christians were arrested, and, through fear of suffering the same dreadful tortures which they saw visited upon the believers, testified falsely that the Christians were wont to indulge in the most atrocious practices. This was believed by the common people, with the result that all pity was extirpated from their breasts,

and they hunted the Christians with a rage which could only be likened to that of wild beasts.

One of the most renowned of the sufferers on this occasion was the slave Blandina, "through whom Christ showed that things which appear mean and obscure and despicable to men are with God of great glory. . . . For while we all trembled, and her earthly mistress, who was herself also one of the witnesses, feared that on account of the weakness of her body she would be unable to make a bold confession, Blandina was filled with such power as to be delivered and raised above those who were torturing her by turns from morning until evening in every manner, so that they acknowledged that they were conquered, and could do nothing more to her. And they were astonished at her endurance, as her entire body was mangled and broken; and they testified that one of these forms of torture was sufficient to destroy life, not to speak of so many and so great sufferings. But the blessed woman, like a noble athlete, renewed her strength in her confession; and her comfort and recreation and relief from the pain of her sufferings was in exclaiming, 'I am a Christian, and there is nothing vile done by us.' "

All this torture seems to have taken place in the examination of Blandina before the tribunal; for we read how, later, she with others was taken to the amphitheatre to be exposed to the wild beasts, a spectacle having been arranged in order that the people might be regaled with the sight of the Christians' sufferings. At this exhibition the people themselves decided as to what forms of cruelties the victims should endure, shouting out their demands for the fiery stake or the beasts, as their horrible fancies dictated.

Blandina was suspended on a cross, and there left to the mercy of any of the numerous wild beasts prowling around

the arena that might choose to attack her. But on this occasion she was left unmolested; and the sight of her, hanging from the stake and thus reminding them of the Master they served, as well as the prayers she continually offered, so heartened her comrades that they were the better enabled to meet their death with a good courage.

The memory of Blandina has justly been preserved through all these centuries as one of the bravest and best in the noble "army of martyrs." No doctor of theology ever bore more effective testimony to the faith; no Christian soldier ever contended more earnestly for the cause; no philosopher ever advanced a stronger argument in evidence of the truth of religion than this poor slave woman who thus suffered in the bloody arena where Christianity fought and conquered seventeen centuries ago. Women were not allowed by the law of the Church to teach in the assembly; but Blandina, from her rostrum of pain which was set up in the amphitheatre at Lyons, by her faith which could enable her to forget her own misery in the desire to cheer other sufferers, preached such a sermon as sentences of polished eloquence can never emulate.

We cannot better finish our account of this great martyr than by quoting the description of her end as it is given in the letter mentioned above. "On the last day of the contests, Blandina was again brought in, with Ponticus, a boy about fifteen years old. They had been brought every day to witness the sufferings of the others, and had been pressed to swear by the idols. But because they remained steadfast and despised them, the multitude became furious, so that they had no compassion for the youth of the boy nor respect for the sex of the woman. Therefore, they exposed them to all the terrible sufferings and took them through the entire round of torture, repeatedly urging them to swear, but being unable to effect this; for

Ponticus, encouraged by his sister so that even the heathen could see that she was confirming and strengthening him, having nobly endured every torture, gave up the ghost. But the blessed Blandina, last of all, having, as a noble mother, encouraged her children and sent them before her victorious to the King, endured herself all their conflicts and hastened after them, glad and rejoicing in her departure as if called to a marriage supper; rather than cast to wild beasts. And, after the scourging, after the wild beasts, after the roasting seat, she was finally enclosed in a net, and thrown before a bull. And after being tossed about by the animal, but feeling none of the things which were happening to her, on account of her hope and firm hold upon that which had been entrusted to her, and her communion with Christ, she also was sacrificed. And the heathen themselves confessed that never among them had a woman endured so many and such terrible tortures."

The horrible circumstances attending the persecution at Lyons seem to have been largely instigated by the fury of the ungovernable mob; there are indications that the trial of Christians was oftentimes carried on in strict conformity with legal measures, and also with some show of pity on the part of the judges. The punishments in cases like these were no less severe; but there is some comfort in thinking, inasmuch as the persecutors were members of the human race like ourselves, that they felt bound by their consciences to proceed to these extreme measures in the endeavor to put down what they believed to be a dangerous innovation. To understand persecution rightly, it is necessary not only to sympathize with the sufferers, but also, so far as is possible, to take the viewpoint of the persecutors. It is only in comparatively recent times that barbarities in legal proceedings have been discontinued. Age has not yet destroyed all the implements of torture

that were considered part of the necessary furniture of a European prison. Far down in Christian times, the examination of a prisoner was considered to be very properly and justly facilitated by the application of thumbscrews and iron boots. Even our own memory is not entirely lacking in incidents where water has been used to the great discomfort of a prisoner, with the object of expediting his confession. Hence, it would be absurd to expect to find a Roman magistrate of the second century after Christ contenting himself with expostulating with those whom the laws, the traditions, and the customs of his country condemned. This failing, he would naturally try a stronger argument.

This is illustrated in the cases of the renowned martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas. These were ladies of Carthage, who suffered during the reign of Severus. Perpetua was only a learner in the Christian faith, not yet having been baptized. She was young, married, and possessed a still stronger tie to existence in the young infant which she carried in her arms. Her father, by whom she was greatly beloved, visited her in prison and endeavored to persuade her to renounce Christianity. Failing in his arguments and entreaties, he even exercised the parental right which the law of his day gave him to chastise his daughter; but he could elicit no word of decision from her other than: "God's will must be done."

While in the prison she was baptized, and was thus still more strongly fortified to meet the trial which was before her. At her examination we have such a picture as is indicated above. The judge entreated her to have compassion on her father's tears, on her infant's helplessness, as well as on her own life. He pointed out to her the cruel position in which she was placed by her religion, and used this as an argument against it. But it all availed nothing. She was returned to the prison to await the day

of execution. Her companion in this direful anticipation was Felicitas, a married woman who was about to become a mother. This Christian woman also, on being brought before the procurator, had been entreated by him to have pity upon herself and her condition; but she had replied that his compassion was useless, since no thought of self-preservation could induce her to be unfaithful to her religion. While in the prison she gave birth to a girl, which was adopted by a Christian woman who as yet was free.

On the day of their execution, Perpetua and Felicitas were taken to the amphitheatre and stripped of their clothing; but on this occasion, however lacking the people may have been in the quality of mercy, they at least showed some feelings of decency, for they requested that the women might be allowed to have their garments. The two martyrs were then exposed to the fury of an enraged bull. The animal attacked them both; but as neither of them was mortally wounded, an officer despatched them with his sword.

The authorities doubtless congratulated themselves that by the death of these poor women the hated religion was by so much reduced; but "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church," and by the courage of its martyrs more people were incited to investigate the new faith than by their sufferings were deterred from following it. In fact, there are instances on record that the constancy of the Christians in their sufferings bore immediate fruit in the conversion of the spectators; where those who came to revile shared in the end the death of those they helped to persecute. The most noted example of this kind is that of Potamiæna, who suffered under the emperor Severus. Rufinus says that she was a disciple of Origen. We are also informed by Palladius that she was a slave, and that her condemnation originated

in the passion of her master. Angered by her steadfast refusal to submit to his desires, he accused her to the judges as a Christian, and bribed them to endeavor to break her resolution and afterward return her to himself; but their tortures proved as ineffectual as his persuasions. At last, being sentenced to death, she was given in charge of Basilides, an officer of the army, to be led to the place of execution. On the way thither, when the people sought to annoy her by insult and abuse, Basilides drove them back, and, probably more by his actions than by words, manifested for her much kindness and pity. Eusebius says that Potamiæna, "perceiving the man's sympathy for her, exhorted him to be of good courage, for she would supplicate her Lord for him after her departure, and he would soon receive a reward for the kindness he had shown her. Having said this, she nobly sustained the issue, burning pitch being poured, little by little, over various parts of her body, from the soles of her feet to the crown of her head. Such was the conflict endured by this famous maiden."

Shortly after this, Basilides, being requested by his fellow soldiers to take an oath, refused; and he gave it as his reason that it was not lawful for him to swear, he being a Christian. At first they thought he was jesting; but as he persistently affirmed it, they took him before the judge, with the result that the next day he was beheaded. He was reported to have said that for three days after her martyrdom Potamiæna stood by him night and day, and that she placed a crown upon his head, telling him that she had besought the Lord for him and had obtained what she asked, which was that he should soon be with her.

In the year 250 the Emperor of Rome was Decius. During his brief reign he instituted one of the severest

persecutions that the Church was called upon to endure. Yet there is reason to believe that this emperor was a man of superior character and high principles. Alarmed at the corruption that prevailed in the empire, he sought to restore the ancient customs and to strengthen the primitive religion. As a means deemed by him necessary to this end, he endeavored to extirpate Christianity. This was the first persecution in which the attempt was universally made to destroy the Church. This persecution was consequently far more terrible than any which had preceded it. Fortunately, the reign of Decius lasted only two years; but during that time vast numbers of Christians were put to death, and the women were as little spared as they had been on former occasions. There is no need of recounting their individual sufferings, as it would simply be a repetition of the horrors described above.

In the meantime, the Church had greatly changed in its character. It had grown sufficiently strong to compete with paganism even in point of numbers. During the periods of peace there were taken into its fold a great many who were not strongly grounded in the faith, nor had they the mind to endure in the time of persecution. Consequently, when it came to the trial, great numbers would return to a formal practice of heathen worship, with the purpose in mind of returning to the Church after the storm had passed over. These often obtained certificates from the magistrates to the effect that they had made the required recantation. The Church had also begun to define its creed with metaphysical nicety of expression, with the consequence that many discussions arose and numerous heretical sects came into being. The heathen, however, did not discriminate; therefore, the heretical had their martyrs as well as the orthodox; and there is no proof that the former were less ready to die for their faith

than the latter. But, to show the jealousy which variety in religious opinion will engender, it is recorded that even when members of the various sects of Christians were suffering martyrdom together, they refused to recognize each other.

By this time also the doctrine of the superior sanctity of virginity had become firmly established in the Church. It was probably owing to this that, in the later persecutions, we frequently find reference made to women being threatened with unchaste attacks on their persons with the sole purpose of driving them to the abjuring of their religion. Gibbon, referring to this, speaks of it in the following manner: "It is related that pious females, who were prepared to despise death, were sometimes condemned to a more severe trial, and were called upon to determine whether they set a higher value upon their religion or upon their chastity. The youths to whose licentious embraces they were abandoned received a solemn exhortation from the judge to exert their most strenuous efforts to maintain the honor of Venus against the impious virgin who refused to burn incense on her altars. Their violence, however, was commonly disappointed, and the seasonable interposition of some miraculous power preserved the chaste spouses of Christ from the dishonor of even an involuntary defeat. We should not indeed neglect to remark that the more ancient as well as authentic memorials of the Church are seldom polluted with these extravagant and indecent fictions."

There is no doubt that the monks of later times did waste their leisure in fabricating such miraculous interposition; but there surely is a flippancy in the tone of what is above quoted, as indeed in Gibbon's whole treatment of the persecution of the early Christians, which is not worthy of the great historian.

Eusebius informs us that "the women were no less manly than the men in behalf of the teaching of the Divine Word, as they endured conflicts with the men, and bore away equal prizes of virtue. And when they were dragged away for corrupt purposes, they surrendered their lives to death rather than their bodies to impurity." He instances the case of a woman and her two daughters, whom Chrysostom, in an oration in their honor, names as Domnina, Bernice, and Prosdose. These women, being as beautiful in their persons as they were virtuous in their minds, were threatened during the Diocletian persecution with violation. While the guard was taking them back to the place from which they had fled to avoid this danger, they took advantage of a moment in which they were not watched to throw themselves into the river, where they found safety in death. Another case was that of the wife of the prefect of Rome. Maxentius, the emperor, being seized with a passionate desire for her, sent officers to bring her to the palace. The lady begged time in which to adorn herself for the occasion. This being granted, as soon as she found herself alone, she stabbed herself, so that the messengers going to her room found nothing but her dead body. These instances are recorded with great admiration by both Eusebius and Chrysostom, showing that the leaders of the early Church deemed it less prejudicial to a woman's salvation for her to take her own life than to suffer even the involuntary defilement of her body.

The reign of Diocletian and his colleagues saw the final struggle between Christianity and paganism. It was a bloody conflict for the Christians; and yet, though they refrained from resisting evil with material weapons, they conquered. Women in great numbers were again faithful unto death. Some were for the time frightened from their

allegiance to Christ; for the pure precepts were becoming increasingly diluted with worldliness as well as superstition. Among these women were the wife and daughter of Diocletian, Prisca and Valeria. These had become converts to the faith; but when the edict was published against the Christians, they sacrificed to the traditional gods. It availed them little, however; for they gained only a few years of most distressful life at the cost of the martyr's crown. In the end the violent death came to them without the honor, for in the year 314 Licinius caused them to be beheaded and their bodies thrown into the sea. They had committed no fault of which any evidence is left; and for several years they had suffered from the loss of their property and from the hardships of exile. Diocletian was still alive, but could render them no aid, as he had abdicated the throne and was now busying himself solely in growing vegetables. Licinius was mistakenly supposed to be a friend to Christianity; Constantine had become its champion. But, as Victor Duruy says: "Notwithstanding celestial visions and marvellous dreams, these men were destitute of heart, and their faith, if they had any, was without influence upon their conduct. Their cruelty was universally commended; in reference to all these murders, the Christian preceptor of a son of Constantine utters a cry of triumph. The inspiration of the gentle Galilean Teacher was replaced by that of the implacable Jehovah of the Mosaic law." The tables had turned; Christianity was now in power; the heretofore persecuted soon set out on the way to become the persecutors.

Chapter IV

Saint Helena and the Time of Constantine

IV

SAINT HELENA AND THE TIME OF CONSTANTINE

AT last we see Christianity triumphant. What has been an obscure but hated and persecuted sect now becomes the dominant religion in the Empire; the people who had hidden underground in the Catacombs are now the favorites of the palace. It had been a conflict between spiritual forces and carnal weapons, between patient propagandism and vindictive conservatism; on one side, invincible missionary zeal joined with undefensive submission, on the other, senseless misrepresentation and cruel persecution. But what can overcome the idea for which men and women are ready to die? It was a conflict in which, on the Christian part, women were as well fitted to engage as were men. The exalted purity of Christian maidens was as effective in setting at naught the counsels of the ungodly as were the elaborate arguments of the apologists; the blood of believing matrons was as fertile for the increase of the Church as was that of bishops and presbyters. The followers of Christ clung to the Cross and conquered.

At the same time, victory did not come without heavy loss to the Church. In this loss, however, must not be reckoned the lives of the martyrs. The men and women who sacrificed themselves to the Cause were considered to have won thereby, not mere fame, but the enjoyment

of celestial glory in a conscious eternal life; and their death was always repaid to the Church by an increase of a hundred-fold. But as the Church gained in extension, it lost in intention. The organization, the religion, the name won; but the spirit, the inner principles of Christianity lost. In this sense the victory was much in the nature of a compromise. Christianity became the faith of the Empire; but the Empire did not adopt for its rule the pure precepts of Christ. Constantine's court worshipped the Nazarene; but Constantine's conduct was not superior to that of many of his heathen predecessors. The ancient religion was superstitious, and it is not possible to contend that the religion of Helena was free from that fault. The women of an older Rome were greatly subject to frailties of the flesh, and like scandals were by no means uncommon in the palaces of Christian emperors. It is not difficult to match Agrippina and Poppæa in the history of Rome after the Council of Nicæa. The religious revolution which took place in the world was much more rapid in respect to theory than it was in practice.

This is the history of all evolutions of the ideal. The first missionaries are exalted by their enthusiasm above common nature; they soar to the clouds. The martyrs are not restrained by any of the ties of various sorts which bind humanity; they despise the flesh. But their converts partake of their spirit in a lesser degree; as these increase, a growing proportion of them realize that for them life must continue to be very much what it always has been. It is not possible for all to maintain themselves in an intense and eager quest for the ideal. The heroic leaders may attain the empyrean, but the multitude must drag on the ground, thankful if at the most they can keep their feet; for, be our ideals what they may, in reality the chief business of life is living.

Again, as in all other movements, when the Church began to grow in popularity, numbers came within her pale whose minds were more attracted by her philosophy than their hearts were affected by her principles. Consequently the Christians were early divided on matters of theological opinion. There were all shades of variation in belief, and each distinction of faith meant a sect more or less divided from the common body of Christians. And it must be admitted that very quickly, even before the fires of persecution had been quenched, there appeared that bitterness which has always characterized and disgraced theological differences in the Church. The leaders of orthodoxy began to deprecate deviations from the common rule of faith with greater severity than they did lapses from fundamental morality. The Church consequently lost much of its pristine influence, which had been so successful in purifying the lives of the Christians. Metaphysical dogmas were exalted at the expense of holy deeds, and it became possible for corrupt rulers to be lauded as defenders of the faith and for unchaste women to receive those ecclesiastical privileges which formerly had been but grudgingly restored to those who had done no more than burn a handful of incense on the altar of Venus to save themselves from martyrdom.

In the letter of the bishops against Paul of Samosata, who was Metropolitan of Antioch about the year 290, he is charged with conniving at the institution of the *subintroductæ*,—that is, women who were pledged to virginity and who yet were so intrepid as to take up their abode in the houses of clergy who also professed celibacy. The idea of this proceeding seems to have been that the constant presence of temptation, which the people were supposed to believe was always overcome, enhanced the victory achieved by these champions of purity. The leaders of

the Church, however, looked with disfavor upon this hazardous method of demonstrating the power of the new religion; but Paul of Samosata seems not only to have allowed this practice, but to have been himself far from careful to avoid suspicious appearances. The bishops, in their letter referred to above, complain thus: "We are not ignorant how many have fallen or incurred suspicion through the women whom they have thus brought in. So that, even if we should allow that he commits no sinful act, yet he ought to avoid the suspicion which arises from such a thing, lest he scandalize some one, or lead others to imitate him. For how can he reprove or admonish another not to be too familiar with women . . . when he has sent one away already, and now has two with him, blooming and beautiful, and takes them with him wherever he goes." Paul was probably not so black as he was thus painted by his enemies; especially is this likely, seeing that his patroness was Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra, who was remarkably careful in her conduct. But the point we wish to establish is found in the admission made by the bishops that, since Paul was a heretic, they had no concern about his conduct. In a note on this, Dr. McGiffert remarks: "We get here a glimpse of the relative importance of orthodoxy and morality in the minds of the Fathers. Had Paul been orthodox, they would have asked him to explain his course, and would have endeavored to persuade him to reform his conduct; but since he was a heretic it was not worth while. It is noticeable that he is not condemned because he is immoral, but because he is heretical. The implication is that he might have been even worse than he was in his morals and yet no decisive steps taken against him, had he not deviated from the orthodox faith." All this goes to show that, after Christianity was established as the dominant religion of

the empire, the life of women as well as of men was less changed by the effect of their new devotions than those devotions were altered in their form and direction. Though a new heaven was proclaimed, the new earth had not yet come into being. "The sweet reasonableness" of the Gospel was beclouded by speculation; the primitive holiness degenerated into a sickly asceticism; for half-converted pagans, the early saints served in the place of the old divinities; and human nature still remained capable of most of the vices to which it had formerly been addicted.

Yet the ideal is never without its witnesses. Very early there arose within the Church the movement known as Montanism, which endeavored to reproduce the ancient purity by an exaggerated rigidity of discipline and the early simplicity of the Church by a stern opposition to ecclesiasticism. This movement carries an interest relative to our subject, inasmuch as two women held a prominent place as its founders. The three original prophets of the sect were Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla. The former of the two women was so influential in the movement that its adherents are frequently spoken of as Priscillianists. The two women were ladies of noble birth who left their husbands in order to attach themselves to Montanus. They believed themselves to be the mediums of the divine Comforter promised by Christ. It was their habit to fall into ecstasies, in which condition they would prophesy. They claimed that their teaching was divinely inspired and consequently infallible. According to them, all gross offenders were to be excommunicated, and never afterward readmitted to the fold of the Church. Celibacy was encouraged by them, all worldly amusements were to be eschewed, and they greatly increased the number of the fasts.

Of Priscilla and Maximilla, Dr. McGiffert says: "They were regarded with the most profound reverence by all Montanists. It was a characteristic of this sect that they insisted upon the religious equality of men and women; that they accorded just as high honor to the women as to the men, and listened to their prophecies with the same reverence. The human person was but an instrument of the Spirit, according to their view, and hence a woman might be chosen by the Spirit as his instrument just as well as a man, the ignorant as well as the learned. Tertullian, for instance, cites, in support of his doctrine of the materiality of the soul, a vision seen by one of the female members of his church, whom he believed to be in the habit of receiving revelations from God."

These people were reactionaries; they rebelled against the spirit of laxity, worldliness, and officialdom which was fast taking hold of the Church. Their prophesying women were simply a revival of what had been common in Apostolic times, when the daughters of Philip were prophetesses. But order had been evolved in the ecclesia. In fact, out of the numerous forms of evangelical activity that existed in the original unsettled condition of the Church, three orders had been established, in none of which were women represented. Moreover, the female friends of Montanus seem to have been rather unconvincing in regard to their prophecies. Maximilla declared that after her there would be no other prophet, intimating that the end of the world was about to take place, a prediction as common among such enthusiasts as it is hazardous in its nature. She also prophesied that wars and anarchy were near at hand, which, as an anonymous writer quoted by Eusebius found no difficulty in showing, was clearly false. With a jubilation which, under the circumstances, was not unwarranted, he cries: "It is to-day more than

thirteen years since the woman died, and there has been neither a partial nor general war in the world; but rather, through the mercy of God, continued peace even to the Christians." From this time, any attempt, on the part of women or men, to revive the gift of prophecy after the apostolic manner was always classed with heresy, schism, and other works of the devil, which it was the duty of the faithful zealously to cast out.

During the many and long intermissions during which the Christians were not persecuted, the Church steadily grew in prominence and in social standing. Before the time of Diocletian, large and handsome edifices had been erected in many places for the use of Christian worship. The doctrines therein taught were no longer unknown to the rulers and chief men of paganism; the faith was no longer the possession almost solely of bondservants and the lowly. Among its conquests were men and women of high position; even the imperial family was now and again strongly suspected of contributing friends to the new religion. Prisca and Valeria, the wife and daughter of Diocletian, were certainly catechumens, though they sacrificed to the heathen deities when the emperor gave his edict for persecution. The world was not to see a Roman empress playing the tragic part of a martyr to Christianity.

Of the time immediately preceding the persecution of Diocletian, Eusebius says: "It is beyond our ability to describe in a suitable manner the extent and nature of the glory and freedom with which the word of piety toward the God of the universe, proclaimed to the world through Christ, was honored among all men, both Greeks and barbarians. The favor shown our people by the rulers might be adduced as evidence; as they committed to them the government of provinces, and on account of the great friendship which they entertained toward their doctrine,

released them from anxiety in regard to sacrificing. Why need I speak of those in the royal palaces, and of the rulers over all, who allowed the members of their households, wives and children and servants, to speak openly before them for the divine word and life, and suffered them almost to boast of the freedom of their faith?"

Thus it came to pass that Christianity grew to be a power which must be reckoned with in the state; all the more so, since, as the historian just quoted admits, many of the motives, influences and usages natural to the world began to be adopted in the Church. It is really doubtful whether the persecution under Diocletian was at all instigated by any animosity on the part of the rulers toward Christian principles. The Church was looked upon as a great party in the state, opposed to traditional conditions, and, while not yet strong enough to be courted, was too numerous to be tolerated. Constantine saw the futility of endeavoring to extirpate the Church, even if his disposition could have allowed him to resort to such cruel measures, and—it is not uncharitable to his memory to say it—he shrewdly concluded to attach this vigorously growing power to himself.

Before we enter upon the study of the character and time of a woman to whose influence the political triumph of Christianity was probably very largely due, it will not be out of place to notice a little more closely the unfortunate career of Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian. She has previously been referred to as a Christian who, with Prisca, her mother, saved herself from martyrdom by sacrificing, though very reluctantly, to the pagan deities. By her father, Diocletian, she had been given in marriage to Galerius, who at that time was made Cæsar and was afterward to become emperor. In every way she proved herself a most estimable wife; and although her courage

was not equal to the endurance of martyrdom, her Christian principles beautified her life with the graces of virtue and charity. Having no children of her own, she adopted Candidianus, the illegitimate son of her husband, and evinced toward him all the affection of a real mother. After the death of Galerius, the great fortune, no less than the personal attractions, of Valeria aroused the desires of Maximin, his successor. This Maximin was the most licentious man that ever disgraced the imperial throne, and to attain preëminence among such competitors required a monster of sensuality. His eunuchs catered to his passions by forcing from their homes wives and virgins of the noblest families; any sign of unwillingness on the part of these victims was regarded as treason and punished accordingly. During his reign, the custom arose that no person should marry without the emperor's consent, in order that he might in all nuptials act the part of *prægustator*.

The fate of Valeria is best described in the words of Gibbon: "He [Maximin] had a wife still alive; but divorce was permitted by the Roman law, and the fierce passions of the tyrant demanded an immediate gratification. The answer of Valeria was such as became the daughter and widow of emperors; but it was tempered by the prudence which her defenceless condition compelled her to observe. She represented to the persons whom Maximin had employed on this occasion, 'that, even if honor could permit a woman of her character and dignity to entertain a thought of second nuptials, decency at least must forbid her to listen to his addresses at a time when the ashes of her husband and his benefactor were still warm, and while the sorrows of her mind were still expressed by her mourning garments. She ventured to declare that she could place very little confidence in the professions of a

man whose cruel inconstancy was capable of repudiating a faithful and affectionate wife.' On this repulse the love of Maximin was converted into fury; and as witnesses and judges were always at his disposal, it was easy for him to cover his fury with an appearance of legal proceedings, and to assault the reputation as well as the happiness of Valeria. Her estates were confiscated, her eunuchs and domestics devoted to the most inhuman tortures, and several innocent and respectable matrons, who were honored with her friendship, suffered death, on a false accusation of adultery. The empress herself, together with her mother Prisca, was condemned to exile; and as they were ignominiously hurried from place to place before they were confined to a sequestered village in the deserts of Syria, they exposed their shame and distress to the provinces of the East, which, during thirty years, had respected their august dignity. Diocletian [who before this had abdicated his throne and was therefore powerless] made several ineffectual efforts to alleviate the misfortunes of his daughter; and, as the last return that he expected for the imperial purple, which he had conferred upon Maximin, he entreated that Valeria might be permitted to share his retirement at Salona, and to close the eyes of her afflicted father. He entreated; but as he could no longer threaten, his prayers were received with coldness and disdain; and the pride of Maximin was gratified in treating Diocletian as a suppliant, and his daughter as a criminal.

"The death of Maximin seemed to assure the empresses of a favorable alteration in their fortune. The public disorders relaxed the vigilance of their guard, and they easily found means to escape from the place of their exile, and to repair, though with some precaution, and in disguise, to the court of Licinius. His behavior, in the first days of his reign, and the honorable reception which

he gave to young Candidianus, inspired Valeria with secret satisfaction, both on her own account and on that of her adopted son. But these grateful prospects were soon succeeded by horror and astonishment; and the bloody executions which stained the palace of Nicomedia sufficiently convinced her that the throne of Maximin was filled by a tyrant more inhuman than himself. Valeria consulted her safety by a hasty flight, and, still accompanied by her mother, Prisca, they wandered above fifteen months through the provinces, concealed in the disguise of plebeian habits. They were at length discovered at Thessalonica; and as the sentence of their death was already pronounced, they were immediately beheaded, and their bodies thrown into the sea. The people gazed on the melancholy spectacle; but their grief and indignation were suppressed by the terrors of a military guard. Such was the unworthy fate of the wife and daughter of Diocletian. We lament their misfortunes, we cannot discover their crimes." It is by no means unlikely, judging from the character of these women, that if the true facts were known, though they were not martyrs in the accepted sense of the word, it would be seen that they suffered for their Christianity, being induced by its principles to refuse their consent to such conduct as would have gained the favor of their persecutors. There have been many more martyrs for the substance of Christianity than there have been for its form; and doubtless there were not a few women, in the times of which we are writing, who would have sacrificed on pagan altars, but who would not have defiled their consciences with acts which paganism excused.

In the preceding pages of this chapter, we have attempted to indicate the fact that, while Christianity was growing in numbers and influence, its effect upon the

moral conditions of the world was not so great as might be expected by a student who confines his attention to its doctrines, rather than to an investigation of the character of the men and women who made the history of that time. As has already been said, the material and political triumph of Christianity was in reality a moral compromise with the world. If the faithful practice of the teachings and the humble following of the example of Christ had been rigidly insisted upon as the *sine qua non* of membership in the Church, it is doubtful if Constantine would have proved a better friend to the Church than was Trajan. Nevertheless, the fact that Constantine did find himself able to favor the Christian religion, without incurring any mental discomfort in the pursuit of his own ideas, rendered it possible for earnest believers in Christ to devote themselves to their faith in perfect security.

How large a share may be rightfully imputed to Helena of the honor of influencing her son's mind to the support of Christianity it is impossible to determine, but that some credit is due to her in this respect the nature of the circumstances warrants us in believing. In any case, Helena was so important a figure in early Church history that her life and doings were a favorite theme for the chroniclers of her time and a welcome opportunity for the legendists of the mediæval age. These latter have so glorified her ancestry and confused the place of her birth that it is entirely impossible to harmonize their statements with those of the former. As an example of the legends of the Middle Ages we give the account of her as it is found in Hakluyt's *Voyages* and quoted by Dr. McGiffert in his Prolegomena to Eusebius's *Constantine the Great*. "Helena Flavia Augusta, the heire and only daughter of Cœlus, sometime the most excellent king of Britaine, by reason of her singular beautie, faith, religion, goodnesse,

and godly Maiestie (according to the testimonie of Eusebius) was famous in all the world. Amongst all the women of her time there was none either in the liberall arts more learned, or in the instruments of musike more skilfull, or in the divers languages of nations more abundant than herselfe. She had a naturall quicknesse of wit, eloquence of speech, and most notable grace in all her behaviour. She was seen in the Hebrew, Greeke, and Latin tongues. Her father (as Virumnius reporteth) had no other childe, . . . Constantius had by her a sonne called Constantine the great, while hee remained in Britaine . . . peace was granted to the Christian churches by her good meanes. After the light and knowledge of the Gospel, she grew so skilfull in divinity that she wrote and composed divers bookes and certaine Greeke verses also, which (as Ponticus reporteth) are yet extant . . . went to Jerusalem . . . lived to the age of fourscore yeeres, and then died at Rome the fifteenth day of August, in the yeere of oure redemption 337. . . . Her body is to this day very carefully preserved at Venice." As the learned author of the Prolegomena says, this is "a matter-of-fact account of things which are not so."

There is another story, to the effect that Helena was the daughter of a nobleman of Trèves. While on a pilgrimage to Rome she was seen by Emperor Constantius, and he, falling in love with her beauty, caused her to be detained in the city until after her companions had returned home. The result was disastrous to Helena's character as a virgin. To assuage her grief, the emperor presented her with an ornament of precious stones and his ring. She continued to remain in Rome with the son that was born to her, allowing it to be understood that her husband was dead. Constantine, her son, grew up to be a young man of remarkably fine presence and unusual parts. These

qualities in him attracted the attention of some rich merchants, who conceived the project of palming him off on the Emperor of the Greeks as the son of the Roman emperor, so that the former might accept him as a son-in-law.

This scheme was successful, and after a time the merchants reëmbarked for Rome, taking with them the princess as Constantine's wife, and also much treasure, which presumably was the object of the adventure. One night they went ashore on a little island, and in the morning the young people awoke to find that they were deserted. Constantine then confessed to the princess the fraud that had been practised upon her; but she magnanimously declared that she was satisfied with him as her husband, whatever his family might be. After some days of privation, they were rescued by passing voyagers and taken on to Rome. There, with the treasure which the princess had managed to retain, they purchased an inn, and, with Helena's assistance, supported themselves by its means. Constantine became so famous through his prowess at tournaments that he attracted the attention of the emperor, who refused to believe that he was of low extraction. Helena was sent for, and, after much questioning, she at last confessed as to who she and her son really were. The truth of her statement was confirmed by the ring which Constantius had given her. The emperor then caused the merchants to be put to death and their property given to Constantine. A treaty was made with the Greek emperor, and Constantine was recognized as the heir to the whole Empire. This story may be regarded as a sort of Middle Age historical novel, the history being metamorphosed without stint in order to enhance the interest of the tale.

The old chroniclers, such as Henry of Huntington, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Pierre de Langtoft, assert that Helena was the daughter of Duke Coel of Colchester,

who became King of Britain. She was the most beautiful and cultivated woman of her time—the attribute of beauty is always awarded to women who have been so fortunate as to become legendary. The most interesting thing about this story is the fact that modern students have identified Duke Coel, the alleged father of Helena, with "Old King Cole," who was the "merry old soul" immortalized in the Mother Goose rhymes.

Let us now turn to what may be seriously regarded as history and therein ascertain what may be known of the life and character of the empress-mother Helena. It must be taken as a well-established fact that her father, so far from being either a king or a duke of Britain, was indeed an innkeeper at Drepanum, a town on the Gulf of Nicomedia. The story suggested by this circumstance is the commonplace one of a soldier in the service of the emperor Aurelian passing a brief sojourn at the hostelry in Drepanum, and, with the proverbially quick susceptibility of the men of his calling, falling in love with the daughter of his host. The necessary negotiations were easy, for a man like Constantius was an unusual catch for a girl in the position of Helena. No time was lost over preliminaries; in fact, the marriage was so little noted that some historians claim that it never took place at all. These hold that Helena was never anything more than the concubine of Constantius; but the fact that Diocletian insisted upon her divorce proves that she was legally married. That, as is often stated, the birth of Constantine took place before the marriage of Helena may not be untrue. Some have found a support for this allegation in the fact that "he first established that natural children should be made legitimate by the subsequent marriage of their parents." From the fact that a number of places lay claim to the honor of being the birthplace of Constantine, it would

seem that Helena accompanied her husband in the wanderings consequent to the profession of a soldier. Gibbon thinks that the historians who award this distinction to Naissus, in Dacia, are the best authorities, though later writers think it rightly belongs to Drepanum, the home of Helena. This place was afterward called Helenopolis by Constantine, in honor of his mother.

Theodoret seems to have thought that Helena gave her son a Christian education, while, on the other hand, we are plainly told by Eusebius that she was indebted to Constantine for her knowledge of Christianity. It is very easy to entertain a doubt of both these theories. If Helena was a Christian when Constantine was a child, and if she trained him in that belief, his after conduct shows extremely unsatisfactory results of a mother's teaching. Constantine certainly did not withdraw his support and patronage from the ancient religion until he was past forty years of age; and it is well known that he delayed his baptism until near the end of his life, so as to enjoy the advantage of its purifying effect at the latest possible moment. These cumulative circumstances render us exceedingly sceptical of the possibility of so zealous a convert as was Helena resulting from so indifferent a teacher as was Constantine.

When his son was eighteen years old, Constantius was promoted to the rank of Cæsar. This majesty, however, Helena was not allowed to share with her husband. The innkeeper's daughter was displaced by a more advantageous match with Theodora, the daughter of the Augustus Maximian. Later on, Fausta, another daughter of Maximian, was married to Constantine, and thus Theodora was made sister-in-law to her own stepson. Such intricate matrimonial alliances were not uncommon among rulers, where the main object is to conserve the family prestige.

How Helena consoled herself in her humiliation, or in what way she occupied herself during the interval between her divorce and the accession of Constantine, we do not know. As is the wont with women in such circumstances who are no longer young, she turned her thoughts to religion. It was most probably at this time that Helena became a Christian openly, though she may have been friendly to the Church while she was still the wife of Constantius.

In the year 306 Constantius died. He left three sons and three daughters, who had been born to him by his second wife Theodora; but the son of Helena, a mature man and an experienced soldier, was immediately promoted by the army from the Cæsarship to the Empire of the West. It is much to his credit that in that age when family ties were no safeguard against inhuman treatment by close but stronger relatives, who sought to secure themselves in the possession of a throne, Constantine nobly cared for the children of the woman for whose sake his own mother had been repudiated. Unfortunately for his reputation, he was not always so humane.

The three half-sisters of the emperor were Constantia, Anastasia, and Eutropia. This is perhaps as good a place as any in which to glance at the history of these women, who did not greatly affect the course of events. Constantia married the Emperor Licinius. She was greatly beloved by Constantine, and at times seemed to wield some influence over his decisions, not sufficient, however, to save the life of her husband or that of her young son. It was during the magnificent festivities occasioned by her marriage at Milan that the two emperors made the first proclamation of religious liberty that was ever heard in an imperial edict by the subjects of Rome. "Religious liberty," they said, "should not be denied, but it should

be granted to every man to perform his duties toward God according to his own judgment." Licinius, however, did not live up to this decision, nor was he loyal to his brother-in-law in other matters. Civil war followed, in which Constantine was victorious, and through his victory he became sole emperor. Constantia pleaded for the life of her husband, and gained from her brother the promise that he should suffer no severer punishment than banishment; but, notwithstanding this brotherly pledge of mercy, a motive was soon discovered which seemed to justify the death of Licinius. Gibbon remarks: "The behavior of Constantia, and her relation to the contending parties, naturally recall the remembrance of that virtuous matron who was the sister of Augustus and the wife of Antony." In later years, when Constantine had become the arbiter of the theological disputes which rent the newly established Church and had banished Arius for his heresy, Constantia again acted the part of peacemaker and, on her deathbed, warned the emperor to "consider well lest he should incur the wrath of God and suffer great temporal calamities, since he had been induced to condemn good men to perpetual banishment." It was probably largely owing to these good offices that Arius was recalled. Notwithstanding her indulgent attitude toward heretics, Constantia seems to have been a woman of genuine Christian feeling, honoring her faith by the nobility of her life, a comment which cannot justly be passed upon all the Christian princesses of her time.

Anastasia, the second sister of Constantine, was married to Bassianus, a man of high position, who, on being favored with this imperial alliance, was further promoted to the rank of Cæsar. He was later discovered in a conspiracy against Constantine and put to death. Further than this there is nothing noteworthy to be told of

Anastasia. Eutropia was espoused to Nepotianus. Of her history there is nothing remarkable recorded except that after the death of her great brother she was slain with her son, who in Rome had headed the rebellion against the usurpation of Magnentius.

We will return now to the court of Constantine, where we shall find his mother installed in great honor and dignity and not without an influence of her own. Whatever may have been the faults of her son, Helena had no cause to complain of any lack of duty on his part toward herself.

The court of Constantine, nominally Christian though it was, exhibited the same characteristics of jealousy and intrigue as had the palaces of the pagan emperors. Before his marriage with Fausta, the emperor had, like his father, contracted a "left-handed" marriage, in his case with a woman named Minervina, whom he repudiated for the sake of an alliance which policy dictated. Some authors seem to insinuate, as in the case of Helena, that there was no marriage in the legal sense; but the testimony rather points to the contrary. However this may have been, Crispus, the son of Minervina, was retained by his father and brought up as a legitimate heir to the purple. This naturally resulted, on the part of Fausta, in jealousy for the rights of her own children. This whole story is deeply shrouded in mystery, as is the wont with the domestic affairs of court; but the few rays of historical light which do penetrate the gloom reveal to us nothing but a horrible intricacy of moral turpitude. The murder of Crispus by the order of his father was the outcome. Some ancient writers accuse Fausta of indulging an unchaste passion for her stepson and of bringing about his death in revenge for his disappointing her desires. They represent her as charging the young man with an attempt

of which his innocence was in reality the cause of her malice toward him; but it is more likely that her fear of his standing in the way of her own sons was the motive for bringing about his downfall. Whether innocent or guilty, Crispus perished, for Constantine, whatever may have been his religion, was as implacably cruel as Tiberius. He even put to death the twelve-year-old son of his favorite sister Constantia, for no other reason than that the lad's existence might prove an injury to his own sons.

But, as Victor Duruy writes, "the tragedy was not yet ended. In the imperial palace lived Helena, the aged mother of the emperor, a rough-mannered, energetic woman, to whom the murder of Crispus was a horrible crime. Repudiated by Constantius Chlorus, she had seen the imperial title and honors pass to a rival; when policy expelled Minervina, as it had driven out herself, from an emperor's dwelling, this similarity in misfortune attached her to the son whom that daughter-in-law had borne to Constantine, and who was to grow up with a stepmother in his father's house. Helena watched over the boy with anxiety, and toward the children of Fausta she felt the same aversion that the latter manifested toward Crispus. Between these two women, no doubt, a mutual hatred existed. How did Helena succeed in making Fausta appear the author of abominable machinations? This we do not know; but we have the fact that, by order of Constantine, the empress was seized by her women, shut up in a hot bath, and smothered."

It must be admitted, however, that all the information that we have on this subject is very hazy. The treatment which the ancient authors gave to the reputation of Fausta depended very considerably upon their purpose of either eulogizing or denouncing Constantine. While some justify

him by declaring that the empress was discovered in the arms of a slave of the stables,—a most incredible story as told of a middle-aged empress,—others speak of her as the most divine and pious of empresses. There is in existence a bronze medallion showing a portrait of Fausta; the strongly marked Grecian features are those of a woman who is evidently fully conscious of the dignity which pertained to "the daughter, wife, sister, and mother of emperors."

After these tragedies had taken place, it is not surprising that Helena decided to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, this being considered, even in times so early, as one of the most effective of moral purgatives. It is asserted that she was directed by dreams to repair to Jerusalem and there search for the Holy Sepulchre. The difficulty of this task was so great that there need be no wonder that the ancient chroniclers believed that she was divinely led. The place of the tomb had been covered with earth, and a temple to Venus erected thereupon. This, Helena caused to be destroyed; and, after much excavating, the sacred cave was found. What emotion, what pious promptings she must have then felt as she stood where, a little over three centuries earlier, the trembling feet of the holy women of Galilee had halted as they fearfully wondered how they should remove the great stone from the mouth of the Sepulchre, when lo! the stone was removed, the entrance was open, and before them stood an angel all in white who announced to them that the Lord had arisen!

Some authorities assert that, believing the Jewish inhabitants possessed definite knowledge that would solve her difficulties, she determined to secure it by the means usually employed by Christians in dealing with reluctant Jews. First, she commanded that all the Jewish rabbis should be

assembled. They came in great fear, suspecting that the object of her visit was to find the Cross. The whereabouts of this precious relic they knew; but they had pledged themselves not to reveal it, even under torture. When they would not satisfactorily answer Helena's questions, she commanded that they should all be burned. This sufficiently overcame their resolution to induce them to deliver up Judas, their leader, saying that he could give the desired information. At first he was obstinate; but Helena gave him the choice of either telling what he knew or of being starved to death. Six days of total abstinence was sufficient to bring him to terms. He was conducted to the place which he indicated; and after prayer by the Christians, there occurred an earthquake, and a beautiful perfume filled the air, because of which Judas was converted. Then he set to digging vigorously, and at a depth of twenty feet came upon three crosses. But how to know which was the cross of the Saviour was the next puzzle to be solved. Macarius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, was equal to the occasion. According to Socrates: "A certain woman of the neighborhood, who had long been afflicted with disease, was now just at the point of death; the bishop therefore arranged that each cross should be brought to the dying woman, believing that she would be healed on touching the precious Cross. Nor was he disappointed in his expectation: for the two crosses having been applied which were not the Lord's, the woman still continued in a dying state; but when the third, which was the true Cross, touched her, she was immediately healed, and recovered her former strength."

Helena then set Judas to work at searching for the nails. They were found shining like gold. These, with the larger portion of the Cross, she sent to Constantine. The nails he converted into bridle-bits, and the wood of the Cross

he secretly enclosed in his own statue, which was set up in the forum at Constantinople.

Helena erected a magnificent church on the site of the Holy Sepulchre, calling it New Jerusalem. She also built a Christian temple at Bethlehem, and still another on the Mount of the Ascension.

Sozomen tells us that "during her residence at Jerusalem, she assembled the sacred virgins at a feast, ministered to them at supper, presented them with food, poured water on their hands, and performed other similar services customary to those who wait upon guests." It is no wonder that the Christian devotees of celibacy came to believe that virginity conferred upon them a rank superior to that obtained from nobility of birth.

It is also recorded of Helena that she not only enriched churches, but that she liberally supplied the necessities of the poor, and released prisoners and those condemned to labor in the mines. Sozomen writes: "It seems to me that so many holy actions demanded a recompense; and indeed, even in this life, she was raised to the summit of magnificence and splendor; she was proclaimed Augusta; her image was stamped on golden coins, and she was invested by her son with authority over the imperial treasury to give it according to her judgment. Her death, too, was glorious; for when, at the age of eighty, she departed this life, she left her son and her descendants masters of the Roman world. And if there be any advantage in such fame—forgetfulness did not conceal her though she was dead—the coming age has the pledge of her perpetual memory; for two cities are named after her, the one in Bithynia, and the other in Palestine. Such is the history of Helena."

Of the fact that Helena is rightly regarded as a prominent character in the history of women there can be no

question; that she was the mother of Constantine and the first avowed Christian empress is enough to warrant this opinion. Her virtue and charity may also be regarded as unimpeachable. Her canonization as a saint, however, is founded upon her alleged discovery of the Cross. Apart from the other difficulties which a sceptical mind may find in this story, there is the fact that Eusebius, who in the lifetime of Constantine wrote the account of Helena's journey to Jerusalem, makes no mention whatever of the Cross, notwithstanding his recital of the appearing of the sacred sign to the emperor and its adoption as the Roman ensign. But the legend, be it true or false, has highly glorified the name of Helena in the religious history of the world.

Chapter V

Post-Nicene Mothers

V

POST-NICENE MOTHERS

IT requires a considerable amount of imagination, coupled with a facility for overlooking untoward historical facts, to enable one to draw an honest and at the same time an entirely pleasing picture of the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries. And yet this may rightly be looked upon as the heroic age of Christianity; it was the period of the Church's greatest victories. It is true that, emerging from the sickening asceticism and rising above the theological squabbles of the time, are mighty men and women of didactic and also of moral renown. "There were giants in those days." Nevertheless, the average moral character of the "Christian" Empire was raised such a slight degree above that of the pagan régime that it is barely perceptible in the records of history. Both Constantine and Constantius stained their palaces with the blood of their innocent relatives. The populace still gloated over gladiatorial combats. Courtesans were licensed in order that their trade might help to replenish the imperial treasury. The rigor of slavery was somewhat softened; yet if a man beat his bondservant to death, he was considered to be acting within his right, providing that he declared that the killing was not in his intention. For offences which to-day are treated with great leniency, slave women were then punished by having melted lead poured down their throats. Moreover, it was

during the first centuries of the Christian state that the fetters of feudalism were forged, by which the poor were bound down to their hopeless wretchedness. Of the artisans the law said: "Let them not dare to aspire to any honor, even if they might deserve it, the men who are covered with the filth of labor, and let them remain forever in their own condition."

The leaven of Christian morality was present in the lump of traditional social conditions; but it had not yet begun to work extensively. Nineteen centuries have produced only the immature results we see at present. The evolution of human kindliness is slow, though, as we may believe, inevitable. A learned and lively English writer of the beginning of the last century, referring to those Church doctors who would have the world venerate the Nicene period as the ideal age of Christianity, says that if "they could but be blindfolded (if any such precaution, in their case, were needed) and were fairly set down in the midst of the pristine Church, at Carthage, or at Alexandria, or at Rome, or at Antioch, they would be fain to make their escape, with all possible celerity, toward their own times and country; and that thenceforward we should never hear another word from them about 'venerable antiquity' or the holy Catholic Church of the first ages. The effect of such a trip would, I think, resemble that produced sometimes by crossing the Atlantic, upon those who have set out, westward, excellent Liberals, and have returned, eastward, as excellent Tories."

There never has come to the world an opportunity to make substantial and unusual progress in its moral development, but that there have been plenty to turn the newly-acquired wisdom into foolishness. The great opportunity in the history of Christianity came in the century marked by the Nicene Council and in that succeeding it.

With the exception of the interlude during the reign of the reactionist Julian, Christianity was the established religion of the Empire. It was popular; the whole world was becoming Christian. Wealth poured into the Church: kings and princes came into its pale bringing their presents. The learned men of the world were the champions of the religion of Jesus. But truly judging from its moral effect on the age, the Church "knew not the day of her visitation." However much honor we may owe them for settling the faith of Christianity, it must be acknowledged that the Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers spent their strength in advocating and glorifying an unnatural virginity—a pitiable substitute for a higher social morality and purer morals for the ordinary individual. Without a first-hand acquaintance with those ancient writers, it is impossible to conceive to what a degree the idea of celibacy was exalted in their teachings. It overshadowed everything else. It overturned every establishment of reason. It vitiated all the pure springs of life. It proceeded on the assumption that everything that is natural is monstrously evil. Gibbon is too indulgent when, as it were with a smile of careless contempt, he thus characterizes this maudlin asceticism: "The chaste severity of the Fathers, in whatever related to the commerce of the two sexes, flowed from the same principle: their abhorrence of every enjoyment which might gratify the sensual, and degrade the spiritual nature of man. It was their favorite opinion, that if Adam had preserved his obedience to the Creator, he would have lived forever in a state of virgin purity, and that some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise with a race of innocent and immortal beings. The use of marriage was permitted only to his fallen posterity, as a necessary expedient to continue the human species, and as a restraint, however imperfect, on the natural licentiousness

of desire. The hesitation of the orthodox casuists on this interesting subject betrays the perplexity of men unwilling to approve an institution which they were compelled to tolerate."

If it did not inspire sadness to discover that human minds, of intelligence above the average, can be capable of such fatuity, it would provoke one to laughter to read the Fathers as they gravely asseverate that they do not consider marriage as being necessarily sinful—providing that it were not committed more than once. Jerome, who was the great advocate of monasticism in the early Church, says that virginity is to marriage what the fruit is to the tree, or what the grain is to the chaff. Seizing upon Christ's parable of the sower, he asserts that the thirty-fold increase refers to marriage; the sixty-fold applies to widows, for the greater the difficulty in resisting the allurements of pleasure once enjoyed the greater the reward; but by the hundred-fold the crown of virginity is expressed. Was there no one to suggest to him that in the natural expectation of increase his order is reversed? As a sample of the turgid rodomontade with which those Fathers of the Church induced the women of their time to sacrifice, for the glory of God, the duties of wifehood and motherhood which the Creator ordained that they should perform, we will quote from Cyprian at length: "We come now to contemplate the lily blossom; and see, O thou, the virgin of Christ! see how much fairer is this thy flower, than any other! look at the special grace which, beyond any other flower of the earth, it hath obtained! Nay, listen to the commendation bestowed upon it by the Spouse himself, when he saith—Consider the lilies of the field (the virgins) how they grow, and yet I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these! Read therefore, O virgin, and read again, and often read

again, this word of thy Spouse, and understand how, in the commendation of this flower, he commends thy glory. In the glory of Solomon you are to understand that, whatever is rich and great on earth, and the choicest of all, is prefigured; and in the bloom of thy lily, which is thy likeness, and that of all the virgins of Christ, the glory of virginity is intended. . . . Virginity hath indeed a twofold prerogative, a virtue which, in others, is single only; for while all the Church is virgin in soul, having neither spot, nor wrinkle; being incorrupt in faith, hope, and charity, on which account it is called a virgin, and merits the praise of the Spouse, what praise, think you, are our lilies worthy of, who possess this purity in body, as well as in soul, which the Church at large has in soul only! In truth, the virgins of Christ are, as we may say, the fat and marrow of the Church, and by right of an excellence altogether peculiar to themselves, they enjoy His most familiar embraces."

The effect of this senseless exaltation of virginity, and of persuading great numbers of maidens to forswear the pleasures and the duties of matrimony, in the conviction that they thereby rendered themselves far more pleasing to God than were their mothers and married sisters, was unquestionably injurious to the morals of the time. The result was as bad for the "lilies" themselves as it was for the women who elected to abide on the natural, but despised, plane for which the Almighty intended them. Too many of the former gave scandalous proof that their ambition for virginal sanctity was unequalled by their steadfastness in the contest. Nature has a way, when insulted, of making reprisals. The writings of the Fathers are full of lamentations and exhortations which indicate that the youthful female saints of their time found it one thing to aspire to the glory of virginity and quite another

to live consistently with its character. All were not satisfied with the indemnification provided by the joys of conscious holiness for the loss of those pleasures which they denied themselves by their vows. Very early there sprang up among the celibates of the Church a fashion of choosing spiritual companions, the choice usually being made from among the opposite sex. The canons of many of the first councils dealt with the *agapetæ* who professed to be the spiritual sisters of the unmarried clergy. Even in the days of persecution this had become prevalent; Cyprian wrote severe strictures on the custom, but did not succeed in bringing about its abolishment. Jerome speaks of it in unrestrained terms: "How comes this plague of the *agapetæ* to be in the Church? Whence come these unwedded wives, these novel concubines, these prostitutes, so I will call them, though they cling to a single partner? One house holds them, and one chamber. They often occupy the same couch, and yet they call us suspicious if we fancy anything amiss. A brother leaves his virgin sister; a virgin, slighting her unmarried brother, seeks a brother in a stranger. Both alike profess to have but one object, to find spiritual consolation from those not their kin. . . . It is on such that Solomon in the Book of Proverbs heaps his scorn. 'Can a man take fire in his bosom,'" he says, "'and his clothes not be burned?'" These insurrections of nature continued until Church celibacy became a fully organized system and the women devoted to perpetual virginity were shut away in convents; even then, if all reports be true, the enemy, though cast down, was not effectually destroyed.

The effect of this laudation of virginity upon the women who chose to remain in the world was equally detrimental to good morals. The natural result of the system might have been easily imagined, if the good sense of the

teachers of that age had not been dulled by the conception of the human body as being hopelessly evil. Out of a large family of girls, one, "Priscilla," or "Agnes," has been induced, by the fervid representations of some apostle of celibacy as to the glorious sanctity of virginity, to devote herself to this "higher life." What will be the effect upon the "Marthas" and the "Elizabeths" who decide to remain in the world? Believing, as they also do, in the greater sanctity of virginity, they will necessarily consider themselves less pure and chaste than they would if such a comparison with their seraphic sister had not been thrust upon them. A line of demarcation is drawn between the once united band. On the one side stand chastity and angelic purity personified in the professed virgin; on the other side is marriage, not forbidden, but merely tolerated; a little lower down, according to the Nicene scale, is concubinage, and lower still, but on the same side, is prostitution. The "Marthas" and the "Elizabeths" were given the alternative of either following the example of "Agnes" —against which their good sense rebelled—or of considering themselves only at the top of a class at the bottom of which were the notoriously impure. No greater injustice than this was ever done to womanhood.

In a society where the chaste love of a wife for her husband and the privileges and duties of a mother were regarded as placing a woman upon an inferior moral grade, it is not surprising to find that a large proportion accepted the rating of their time and lived down to it. Largely in consequence, then, of the substitution of a fantastic holiness for unromantic goodness, though the Church grew strong in the world, morals remained much what they had been under paganism. True, there were many of those professed virgins whose names are recorded in history, and who, as the result of what seems to have

been a prodigious contest, maintained their character and withal achieved a noble and deserved reputation; but it is at least open to question whether or not the influence of these shining marks of sanctity was not offset by the otherwise pernicious effect of the system.

Before we proceed to the individual mention of some of these early saints, we will glance at the secular women who were their contemporaries.

Constantine had thoroughly orientalized the imperial court, and all the officials and aristocracy of the empire followed the fashion according to the degree of their ability. Gorgeous apparel, trains of eunuchs, barbaric splendor, and ostentatious titles replaced the white toga and the stately, though severe, grandeur of the Roman citizen of former times. The Roman spirit was dying out in sloth and effeminacy; it was fitting that a new capital of the Empire should be erected in the East, for the new times were strange and unrelated to the manes of the Roman ancestors. Nobility of thought had likewise perished, at least from the secular life of the Empire. As Duruy says: "Courts have sometimes been schools of elegance in manners, refinement in mind, and politeness in speech. Literature and art have received from them valuable encouragement. But at the epoch of which we are writing, poetry and art—those social forces by which the soul is elevated—no longer exist. With an Asiatic government and a religion soon to become intolerant, great subjects of thought are prohibited. There is no discussion of political affairs, for the emperor gives absolute commands; no history, for the truth is concealed or condemned to a complaisance which is odious to honest men; no eloquence, for nowhere can it be employed except in disgraceful adulation of the sovereign. . . . Only the Church is to have mighty orators,—but in the interests of heaven, not

earth; and so, in this empire now exposed to countless perils, the little mental activity now existing in civil society will occupy itself only with court intrigues, the subtleties of philosophers aspiring to be theologians, or the petty literature of some belated and feeble admirers of the early Muses."

The three sons of Constantine, among whom, by will, he divided the Empire, were adherents of the Christian religion; but Constantius, who soon became the sole ruler, though a weighty factor in the evolution of the Church's doctrine, was no very edifying example of the moral effect of her teaching. His jealousy and implacability almost exterminated the race of Constantine, numerously represented as that sturdy emperor had left himself. The closest ties of relationship did not avail to save the lives of those who might stand in the way of the new ruler's ambitions. Constantina, the sister of Constantius, had been married to Hannibalianus, his cousin, but in spite of this double relationship the latter cruelly perished.

Constantina was a woman of whom it would be interesting to know more than the few references which history affords. She must have been a person of able as well as ambitious character, for her father had invested her with the title of Augusta. After his death, she deemed that the purple ought not to clothe a woman with mere powerless dignity, but that the right was hers to take a hand in the affairs of the Empire. In this view of her privileges she lacked the support of her three brothers: the situation was sufficiently disturbed by their own inharmonious claims. But after the death of Constans and Constantine, the way was cleared for Constantina to push her own interests. This she did by creating a puppet emperor out of Vetranio, a good-natured and obliging old general who was commanding in Illyricum. Constantina herself bound the

diadem upon his brow; but during an interview with Constantius, a menacing shout of the soldiers induced Vetranio hastily to divest himself of the purple and thankfully accept his life with an honorable exile. Constantina had the diplomacy to make her peace with her brother as soon as she saw the fruitlessness of this scheme. She probably had deserted Vetranio before he had ceased trying to reign for her. Later on, she was married to Gallus, who, with his brother Julian, alone of the princes of the house of Constantine had survived the suspicion and the cruelty of Constantius. Gallus was appointed Cæsar of the Eastern provinces, and thus Constantina's ambitions were appeased. But as is frequently the case with those who are ambitious of political power, though intensely eager for the purple, she was entirely unworthy of the position. The historians of the time give this woman an exceedingly bad name, and doubtless the people of Antioch, where she and her husband established their court, agreed that it was abundantly deserved. She is described, not as a woman, but as one of the infernal furies, tormented with an insatiate thirst for human blood. That, of course, we may consider an extravagance of rhetoric on the part of Ammianus; but there is an ugly story of a pearl necklace which Constantina received from the mother-in-law of one Clematius of Alexandria. The ornament procured the death of Clematius, who had incurred the malice of his relative by disappointing her of his love. The rapacity and cruelty of Constantina, joined with the mad profligacy of her husband, ended by ruining them both. The displeasure of Constantius was aroused, and that was usually only appeased by the death of its object. He sent urgent messages inviting Gallus to visit him in the West, for the purpose of consulting on the affairs of the Empire; and it was especially urged that the Cæsar should bring his wife,

"that beloved sister whom the emperor ardently desired to see." Constantina "knew perfectly of what her brother was capable"; she was not deceived by his protestations of affection for herself. But while she might be able to pacify him on the ground of her sex and their relationship, it was certain death for Gallus to put himself in the power of the tyrant of the East. Constantina set out alone to make her plea to her brother, but died on the way. There was nothing that her husband could do but obey the "invitation" of the emperor; but he was not allowed to see the face of Constantius. On the road, he was seized, and, after a mock trial, in which no sort of defence could have saved him, was beheaded.

Julian, the brother of Gallus, alone of the progeny of Constantine remained. His life was constantly in danger from the suspicions of Constantius; but it was preserved, and thereby paganism was destined to have one more trial, or rather one more dying struggle. That Julian escaped the dangers to which he was exposed was probably owing in a large measure to the friendship of Eusebia, the wife of the emperor. He afterward repaid this kindness by an eloquent, and we may be assured sincere, eulogium upon her character.

Eusebia was a native of Thessalonica, in Macedonia, Her family was of consular rank. She became the second wife of Constantius in the year 352, and seems to have enjoyed in matters political a considerable influence with her husband, which she always employed meritoriously. Her beauty is frequently spoken of by the ancient authors as being remarkable; but what is still more worthy of notice is the fact that, in an age when there were so many divided interests, the historians of all parties agree in the praise of her moral character. True, there is a hint somewhere that her kindness to Julian sprung from

a tenderer motive than friendship; but all else that is known of her, as well as the frozen nature of Julian himself, sufficiently refutes such a suggestion.

In the time of Eusebia the Church was torn by the contentions between the orthodox and the followers of Arius. Constantius, as the imperial arbiter of eternal truth as well as of the temporal destinies of his subjects, sought to obtain peace by banishing the principal disputants, as he did Athanasius and Liberius of Rome. Eusebia's chief connection with these events, though herself an Arian, seems to have been influenced by her charitable inclination. When Liberius was going away into exile she sent him five hundred pieces of gold with which to defray his expenses. This however, rather churlishly as it would seem, he sent back with the message that she "take it to the emperor, for he may want it to pay his troops."

In this connection there is an incident recorded by Theodoret which indicates that the clergy, especially the bishops, of those times found resolute champions among the ladies, as they have in all ages. Two years after the exile of Liberius, Constantius went to Rome. "The ladies of rank urged their husbands to petition the emperor for the restoration of the shepherd to his flock: they added, that if this were not granted, they would desert them, and go themselves after their great pastor. Their husbands replied, that they were afraid of incurring the resentment of the emperor. 'If we were to ask him,' they continued, 'being men, he would deem it an unpardonable offence; but if you were yourselves to present the petition, he would at any rate spare you, and would either accede to your request, or else dismiss you without injury.' These noble ladies adopted this suggestion, and presented themselves before the emperor in all their customary splendor

of array, that so the sovereign, judging their rank from their dress, might count them worthy of being treated with courtesy and kindness. Thus entering the presence, they besought him to take pity on the condition of so large a city, deprived of its shepherd, and made an easy prey to the attacks of wolves. The emperor replied, that the flock possessed a shepherd capable of tending it, and that no other was needed in the city. For after the banishment of the great Liberius, one of his deacons, named Felix, had been appointed bishop. He preserved inviolate the doctrines set forth in the Nicene confession of faith, yet he held communion with those who had corrupted that faith. For this reason none of the citizens of Rome would enter the house of prayer while he was in it. The ladies mentioned these facts to the emperor. Their persuasions were successful; and he commanded that the great Liberius should be recalled from exile, and that the two bishops should conjointly rule the Church. This latter arrangement did not suit the people, so Felix retired to another city."

Liberius generally refused to acknowledge Arians as Christians; whether or not he had the boldness to refuse that name to the empress is not told us. It is certain that Eusebia's kindness to Julian was worthy of a Christian, even though it succored one who was to be the arch-enemy of the faith. She befriended and protected him when he was summoned to a court where it was to the interest of every courtier to report every action and every chance word to Constantius. She may have been desirous of making a friend of the heir-apparent, being herself childless; but it is easy to believe that "the good and beautiful Eusebia," as Julian calls her, was both sincere and disinterested in her kindness. She brought it about that the emperor gave his permission to the young man, who had

hitherto been a prisoner, to retire to a beautiful estate which he had inherited from his mother.

The fortunes of Julian were in good hands at the court. Constantius was greatly influenced by the eunuchs who surrounded him, and who were the bureaucratic officers of those times; but Eusebia was stronger than all others combined. When the emperor complained that the unaided rule was too much for him, she suggested that he raise his young kinsman to the Cæsarian dignity. Her advice was followed; and the imperial purple, and with it the hand of Helena, the sister of Constantius, were conferred upon Julian. As a wedding gift, Eusebia, with the most refined consideration possible, presented him with a valuable collection of the best Greek authors. It is likely that he felt more appreciative gratitude for the books than he did either for the official dignity or the highborn bride. As Cæsar, it was intended by Constantius that he should be no more than a figure; and for his wife it is doubtful if he ever felt any real affection. As historians have remarked, in his numerous writings Julian sometimes mentions the Helen of Homer, but never once his own Helen. She must have been considerably older than her husband, and was probably a Christian, as were her brothers. That there was no offspring of this marriage was imputed to the arts of Eusebia, who, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, exercised a close and unnatural supervision over the household of her protégé. Inasmuch as there appears no motive for a wish on the part of the empress that Helena should be childless, we are inclined, as Gibbon says, "to hope that the public malignity imputed the effects of accident as the guilt of Eusebia." The empress died in the year 360, immediately before Julian broke with Constantius and began to rule on his own authority.

Julian led a forlorn hope in the cause of the old gods. This at least may be said for him: there was nothing in the treatment which he received from those who professed to be Christians to hold his faith to their religion. One only had befriended him, and she was regarded as a heretic. The historians of the time endeavor to picture Julian as leading a crusade of persecution against Christianity. Theodoret speaks of his "mad fury"; but inasmuch as he is constrained to recount stories which rather illustrate the triviality of the mind of the historian than the cruelty of the persecutor, it is evident that the glory of martyrdom was not won to any considerable extent under Julian. We are inclined to think that one of these narratives exemplifies the latter's patience more than any other of his characteristics. There was a woman named Publia, who had become the prioress of a company of virgins. One day these women, seeing the emperor coming, struck up the psalm which recites how "the idols of the nations are of silver and gold," and, after describing their insensibility, adds "like them be they that make them and all those that put their trust in them." Julian required them at least to hold their peace while he was passing by. Publia did not, however, pay the least attention to his orders, except to urge her choir to put still greater energy into their chaunt; and when again the emperor passed by she told them to strike up: "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered." At last Julian commanded one of his escort to box her ears. "She however took outrage for honor, and kept up her attack upon him with her spiritual songs, just as the composer and teacher of the song laid the wicked spirit that vexed Saul."

Before we leave this brief reference to the secular matrons of the early Church in order to turn our attention to the sacred virgins, it is necessary to summon the

testimony of Jerome. This learned and eloquent Father is the great authority on the women of his time. Only those vowed to celibacy enjoyed his highest approbation; yet he had many friends among the married ladies of Rome. Jerome was a satirist. His pen was caustic when it dealt with persons or matters that did not meet his approval. He was the Juvenal of his age, but he wrote in prose, and not for the sake of satire, but as the champion of orthodoxy and virginity. Many of his writings are in the form of letters to ladies who were his friends. The one to Eustochium, the daughter of Paula, is the most striking of all. In this epistle Jerome sets forth the motives which should actuate those who adopt the monastic life. It also gives us a vivid picture of Roman society as it then was—the luxury, profligacy, and hypocrisy prevalent among both men and women. This letter was written at Rome in the year 384. "I write to you thus, Lady Eustochium (I am bound to call my Lord's bride 'lady'), to show you by my opening words that my object is not to praise the virginity which you follow, and of which you have proved the value, or yet to recount the drawbacks of marriage, such as pregnancy, the crying of infants, the torture caused by a rival, the cares of household management, and all those fancied blessings which death at last cuts short. Not that married women are as such outside the pale; they have their own place, the marriage that is honorable and the bed undefiled. My purpose is to show you that you are fleeing from Sodom and should take warning by Lot's wife." Such is the tone and tenor of Jerome's correspondence with the women of his acquaintance. Among many other things, he cautions Eustochium not to court the society of married ladies, and not to "look too often on the life which you despised to become a virgin!" Many glimpses are given of the characteristics of that life which

was to be so carefully avoided. The pride of those who are the wives of men in high position, and also their delight in troops of callers, are noticed. They are pictured as they are carried about the streets in gorgeous litters, with rows of eunuchs walking in front. Their dress is mentioned: red cloaks, robes inwrought with threads of gold, and creaking shoes. Jerome is even so unsparing as to refer to those who "paint their eyes and lips with rouge and cosmetics; whose chalked faces, unnaturally white, are like those of idols; upon whose cheeks every chance tear leaves a furrow; who fail to realize that years make them old; who heap their heads with hair not their own; who smooth their faces, and rub out the wrinkles of age; and who, in the presence of their grandsons, behave like trembling school-girls." Some of Jerome's strictures are suggestive of modern feminine habits. Speaking of Blæsilla, after she had become a widow and was determined to persevere in that estate, he says that in days gone by she had been extremely fastidious in her dress, and had spent whole days before her mirror endeavoring to correct its deficiencies. Her head, "which had done no harm, was forced into a waving head-dress." But all this is changed. Now "no gold and jewels adorn her girdle; it is made of wool, plain, and scrupulously clean. It is intended to keep her clothes right, and not to cut her waist in two."

Eustochium, as a professed virgin of the Church, is warned not to trifle with verse, nor to make herself gay with lyric songs. "And do not, out of affectation, follow the sickly taste of married ladies who, now pressing their teeth together, now keeping their lips wide apart, speak with a lisp, and purposely clip their words, because they fancy that to pronounce them naturally is a mark of country breeding."

In another place the Father of asceticism says: "To-day you may see women cramming their wardrobes with dresses, changing their gowns from day to day, and for all that unable to vanquish the moths. Now and then one more scrupulous wears out a single dress; yet, while she appears in rags, her boxes are full. Parchments are dyed purple, gold is melted into lettering, manuscripts are decked with jewels, while Christ lies at the door naked and dying. When they hold out a hand to the needy they sound a trumpet; when they invite to a love-feast they engage a crier. I lately saw the noblest lady in Rome—I suppress her name, for I am no satirist—with a band of eunuchs before her in the basilica of the blessed Peter. She was giving money to the poor, a coin apiece; and this with her own hand, that she might be accounted more religious. Hereupon a by no means uncommon incident occurred. An old woman, 'full of age and rags,' ran forward to get a second coin, but when her turn came she received, not a penny, but a blow hard enough to draw blood from her guilty veins." Rome had always successfully withstood the rhetorical lashings of her censors; had it not been for this power of resistance, the castigations of a Jerome surely would have sufficed to hold the natural frivolity of the women of his time at least within the bounds of modesty.

The moral influence of Jerome illustrated the danger of insisting on perfection with the result of falling below the average of possible attainment. In his letters to Paula, Eustochium, Marcella, and Asella, women who delighted him by manifesting an astounding resolution in mortifying the flesh, he continually laments those who, professing to have made an offering of their virginity to Christ, were in reality a scandal to the Church.

Paula was a Roman lady of the highest rank and greatest wealth. The genealogy of her father ascended through

the highest names in Grecian history; her mother, Blæsilla, numbered the Scipios and the Gracchi among her ancestors. Paula was Cornelia reincarnated in the fourth century of Christianity; the only differences are that the former maintained a chaste widowhood inspired by fuller hopes than earthly renown, and instead of entertaining men of learning at Misenum she studied Hebrew with Jerome in a squalid cave at Bethlehem. This devout lady had much to resign in order that she might enter upon a life of poverty. One of the most magnificent houses of Rome was hers, and she drew her revenues from the city of Nicopolis, the whole of which she owned. She was born in the year 347, ten years after the death of Constantine. At the age of seventeen she was married to Toxotius, who was a descendant of the illustrious Julian family. She was the mother of five daughters and one son. It seems likely that she owed her conversion to Christianity to the holy Marcella, one of that circle of ascetic women to whom the letters of Jerome were addressed. Until the time of her husband's death, the life of Paula in her magnificent palace on the Aventine was similar to that of other wealthy Roman ladies, except that her means enabled her to excel all others in elegance. On her conversion, and as the best proof of its reality, in the estimation of those days, she distributed a quarter of her immense estate to the poor. The ideas then prevalent would not permit her to deem herself an earnest Christian unless she entirely relinquished her habits of luxury. This she did, and devoted herself to the care of the indigent and the nursing of the infirm. Her piety would not even allow her sufficiently to sustain her bodily strength for these noble labors. She lived on bread and a little oil, on many days denying herself even that until after sunset. Her dress was the

rough garb of the slave; her couch was a mat of straw, covered with haircloth.

There was, however, one enjoyment which Paula allowed herself: she was one of a circle of ladies, all ascetics like herself, who were devoted to the study of literature. There was Marcella, who was the first of the highborn Roman ladies to embrace the monastic life, and of whom Jerome gives this account: "Her father's death left her an orphan, and she had been married less than seven months when her husband was taken from her. Then, as she was young and highborn, as well as distinguished for her beauty and her self-control, an illustrious consular named Cerealis paid court to her with great assiduity. Being an old man, he offered to make over to her his fortune so that she might consider herself less his wife than his daughter. Her mother Albina went out of her way to secure for the young widow so exalted a protector. But Marcella answered: 'Had I a wish to marry and not rather to dedicate myself to perpetual chastity, I should look for a husband and not an inheritance;' and when her suitor argued that sometimes old men live long while young men die early, she cleverly retorted: 'a young man may die early, but an old man cannot live long.' This decided rejection of Cerealis convinced others that they had no hope of winning her hand."

Marcella may indeed be termed the prioress of the community of ascetics which gathered in her house and in that of Paula on the Aventine hill. She studied Hebrew with Jerome, and became so proficient in Scriptural exposition that, after the latter's departure for the Holy Land, even the clergy would bring to her for solution such questions as were too difficult for them. When Alaric and his Goths sacked the city of Rome, the prayers and the evident holiness of Marcella induced the barbarians to

spare her life and the honor of the virgin Principia, who dwelt with her, and they even left her house unmolested.

Another shining light in that Aventine circle was Asella, who had been dedicated to the Church from her tenth year. Her fastings may be said to have been almost unintermittent, so that Jerome thought it was only by the grace of God that she survived until her fiftieth year without weakening her digestion. "Lying on the dry ground did not affect her limbs, and the rough sackcloth that she wore failed to make her skin either foul or rough. With a sound body and a still sounder soul she sought all her delight in solitude, and found for herself a monkish hermitage in the centre of busy Rome."

Among the good women of that day were also Albina and Marcellina, who were the sisters of Saint Ambrose. Marcellina made a public profession of virginity before a great congregation which gathered on Christmas day in the Church of Saint Peter. She received the veil from the hands of the bishop Liberius. In a work addressed to her Ambrose repeats the instructions which his sister received from the bishop at that time. The work is of no little interest, as it clearly sets forth the idea which governed the lives of professed nuns of that early date.

Paula also numbered among her companions Fabiola, a woman noble both in character and race, who, after a stormy youth, found peace in the haven of ascetic devotion. Jerome describes her life in his seventy-seventh letter. Fabiola was censured for putting away one husband and marrying again while the man whom she divorced was yet alive. Jerome's defence of her divorce shows such liberality of thought on the rights of women in this regard that part of it is worth quoting. He says: "I will urge only this one plea, which is sufficient to exonerate a chaste matron and a Christian woman. The Lord gave

commandment that a wife must not be put away 'except it be for fornication, and that, if put away, she must remain unmarried.' Now a commandment which is given to men logically applies to women also. For it cannot be that, while an adulterous wife is to be put away, an incontinent husband is to be retained. . . . The laws of Cæsar are different, it is true, from the laws of Christ. . . . Earthly laws give a free rein to the unchastity of men, merely condemning seduction and adultery; lust is allowed to range unrestrained among brothels and slave-girls, as if the guilt were constituted by the rank of the person assailed and not by the purpose of the assailant. But with us Christians what is unlawful for women is equally unlawful for men." It is only in very modern times that the secular law has conformed to this just opinion, and even now the social treatment received by the sinner is guided by a view the opposite of that expressed by Jerome.

So Fabiola took another husband, and therein she was held to have sinned deeply. Repentance, however, soon followed—a life-long penitence, an expiation offered by a continual sacrifice of good works. The whole of her property she gave to the poor; among other good deeds she founded a hospice for the shelter of the destitute. She resided for a while with Jerome, Paula, and Eustochium at Bethlehem, but returned to Rome to die. Her funeral was a reminder of the old-time triumphs. All the streets, porches, and roofs from which a view could be obtained of the procession were insufficient to accommodate the spectators.

Into this circle of holy women came Jerome, the most learned and the most brilliant man of his time. He was their equal in birth, and he, like them, had disposed of his property in charity to the poor. He became their friend,

their teacher, their oracle. So assured was he of his ascendency over his friends that he often gave his advice in a manner which savored of arrogance.

In the year 385 Jerome bade farewell to these devoted friends and sailed away to the land which was consecrated by the life and sufferings of Christ. He desired retirement, in order that he might be free to meditate and to prosecute his great work of translating the Scriptures. From the ship in which the journey was made he addressed a letter to Asella. It seems that slanderous tongues had foolishly assailed him in regard to his friendship with those women whose attractions could not have been other than spiritual. He admits that, of all the ladies of Rome, one only had the power to subdue him, and that one was Paula. He had been able to withstand countenances beautified both by nature and also by art; with Paula alone, "who was squalid with dirt," and whose eyes were dimmed with continual weeping, was his name associated. Calumny on this subject was too absurd to be treated with seriousness. The reference to Paula's personal untidiness gives us the occasion to remark that, contrary to the generally accepted axiom regarding the religious worth of cleanliness, those ancient nuns were taught to believe that the bath was rather conducive to ungodliness. It was a dangerous subserviency to the flesh: its eschewment was doubtless a powerful safeguard to chastity.

Two years after the departure of their friend, Paula and Eustochium gratified a wish which they had long cherished, to visit the Holy Land. A most graphic picture of Paula leaving her children and friends is given us in one of Jerome's letters. They realized, what was not, perhaps, openly acknowledged, that it was a final good-bye. We are shown the young girls clinging to their mother in the

endeavor to dissuade her from her purpose. But the sails are unfurled and the stout-armed rowers are in their places; Rufina, a maiden just entering womanhood, with quiet sobs, beseeches her mother to wait until she should be married. As the vessel moves away, little Toxotius, the youngest-born and her only son, stretches out his tiny hand and pleads with his mother to come back. But no entreaty could turn Paula from her pious though hardly commendable purpose. "She overcame her love for her children by her love for God." That was the favorable judgment of the time. A less enthusiastic, but saner, age can hardly bestow such unmitigated praise.

After a journey through all the places made famous by Scripture, in every one of which they were received with great honor, Paula and her daughter made their home at Bethlehem, where Jerome already had his cell. There she built a convent; and for eighteen years she devoted her life to the training of the many virgins who resorted to her company, attracted by the fame of her holiness. At her death, the manner of which was truly edifying, it was found that Paula had disposed of the whole of her property in charity. Though it is probable that these ascetic women were to a large extent under the influence of motives less exalted than that mentioned above, much good intention must be laid to their credit; and doubtless their extreme self-denial was not without a salutary effect in a sensual world. At the end of his description of her death, which he wrote for her daughter, Jerome says: "And now, Paula, farewell, and aid with your prayers the old age of your votary."

Chapter VI

The Nuns of the Primitive Church

VI

THE NUNS OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

WE have already given some attention to certain famous Christian women who, in the earliest ages of the Church, dedicated themselves to the ascetic life. But monasticism, occupying as it did so extensive and important a field in the early Church, deserves the devotion of nothing less than a chapter to the consideration of its effect upon the life of women, and to the part they played in its establishment. In describing the friends of Jerome—Paula, Eustochium, Asella, and the others—we dwelt more on the moral aspect of primitive asceticism, its exaggerations, its wrong-headedness, its influence upon family life; it is now our purpose to take a brief glance at the organization of female monasticism, and to notice its effect upon the social life of women. For it cannot be otherwise than that so popular and general an institution as this must at the time have profoundly affected human existence. A great multitude of men and women taken out of common society and living apart under conditions entirely contradictory to the instinct and usages of the race must have shaken the body politic in every direction, causing a movement of influences far-reaching in its effect.

Monasticism was not the creation of Christianity; the religions of the East had their devotees, like the Jewish Essenes, who abandoned the common pursuits of men for

a life of solitude, idle introspection, and rapt contemplation. The wildernesses and solitary places of the East had been made yet more weird by the presence of unhumanlike hermits, even before the days of John the Baptist. Christian monasticism, also, had its birth in the dreamy East. Antony, by his example, and Pachomius, by enthusiastic propaganda of monastic ideas, laid the foundations of that system which was to honeycomb the whole world with bands of men and women who repudiated the natural pleasures and the essential duties of the world.

Of the motive that inspired the monastic life, St. Augustine says: "No corporeal fecundity produces this race of virgins; they are no offspring of flesh and blood. Ask you the mother of these? It is the Church. None other bears these sacred virgins but that one espoused to a single husband, Christ. Each of these so loved that beautiful One among the sons of men, that, unable to conceive Him in the flesh as Mary did, they conceived Him in their heart, and kept for him even the body in integrity."

We may admit this intense love of God as a moving force, and still claim that the hermits and anchoresses of the early Church were actuated largely by the desire to redeem themselves from the wrath to come and to gain a personal entrance to the paradise of God. Salvation was an individual responsibility, and it admitted of no compromise with the world. The road to perfection could be cheered with company only, providing others were willing to set out upon it by first renouncing all natural joys, and by despising all human ties. The claims of close kindred were not allowed to hinder in the personal quest for heavenly rewards. The tearfully pleaded needs of an aged parent were not permitted to detain at home the daughter who had consecrated herself as the bride of Christ; Paula turned her back upon the outstretched

hands of her infant son, in order that in the Holy Land she might spend her days in ecstatic contemplation of the Jerusalem above. It is recorded to the high praise of Saint Fulgentius that he sorely wounded his mother's heart by despising her sorrow at his departure.

True it is that many of the earliest consecrated handmaidens of the Church continued to reside in their city homes, and, in addition to their prayers, devoted themselves to works of charity and mercy. But they were scarcely less separated from the world and their kindred. Their manner of life interdicted all common intercourse. The virgin who could boast that for twenty-five years she never bathed, except the tips of her fingers, and these only when she was about to receive the Communion, must have been as foreign to the Rome in which she lived as if she inhabited a cave in the Thebaid. Her kinsfolk may have reverenced her sanctity, but it is doubtful if they unqualifiedly appreciated her presence. The explanation of this transcendent personal neglect is to be found in the dualism which was so considerable an element in the *motif* of monasticism. The religious sphere was exclusively spiritual and of the mind; the material world was considered to be wholly under the dominion of the devil if it were not, indeed, his work. The body, with all its appetites, instincts, pleasures, and pains, was regarded as a spiritual misfortune. Holiness was not deemed to be in any degree attainable except by constant and determined thwarting of all natural desire. The compulsion to give way to any extent to the most essential of these desires was, so far as it obtained, a moral imperfection. The three great human faults are lust, pride, and avarice. To subjugate these, celibacy, absolute submission, and complete poverty, were deemed necessary by the advocates of monasticism. Because purity is enjoined, the saint of one sex must treat a person

of the other with the same avoidance as would be displayed toward a poisonous reptile; readiness to embrace a leper is none too severe a test of humility; and personal property in a hair blanket is a pitfall laid by wealth. A body so wasted by fasting as to be incapable of sustaining the continuous round of tears and prayers is the surest warrant of saintliness. A virgin who has so abused her stomach by improper and insufficient food that it refuses a meal necessary to a healthy body is the object of high veneration; indigestion is a most desirable corollary to holiness. In short, without outraging reason and contradicting every dictum of common sense, it is difficult to describe much that belonged to ancient monasticism in any other spirit than that of impatience.

Like most institutions, monasticism began in a formless, undirected enthusiasm. Men and women rushed into the wilderness with an abundantly zealous determination to get away from the wickedness of the world, but with a still greater scarcity of understanding regarding a reasonable discipline of life. Soon, however, organization was proposed by monks of experience, and rules formulated which were generally adopted. Saint Pachomius was the first to form monkish foundations in the East. These were visited by Athanasius while he was in exile, and he came back with a glowing account of the sanctity of life and the marvellous exploits of their members. His narrative fired the hearts of the more devout Christians of the West, especially of the women, and that of the monk or the nun became at once the most illustrious vocation which a Christian could follow. The result was, as the Count de Montalembert shows, that "the town and environs of Rome were soon full of monasteries, rapidly occupied by men distinguished alike by birth, fortune and knowledge, who lived there in charity, sanctity

and freedom. From Rome, the new institution—already distinguished by the name of religion, or religious life, par excellence—extended itself over all Italy. It was planted at the foot of the Alps by the influence of a great bishop, Eusebius of Vercelli. From the continent, the new institution rapidly gained the isles of the Mediterranean, and even the rugged rocks of the Gargon and of Capraja, where the monks, voluntarily exiled from the world, went to take the place of the criminals and political victims whom the emperors had been accustomed to banish thither."

Western monasticism was inspired by a different genius from that of the Eastern. Instead of being speculative and characterized by dreamy indolence and meditative silence, it was far more practical. It was active, stirring; duty, rather than esoteric wisdom, was its watchword. Fasting, stated hours for prayer, reading, and vigorous manual work were strictly enjoined by every rule. Consequently, the nuns and monks of the West never went to the fantastic extremes which exhibited in the East a stylite, or a female recluse, dwelling, like an animal, in a hollow tree, or a drove of half wild and wholly maniacal humans who subsisted by browsing on such edible roots as they found in the earth on which they grovelled. Method, regularity, and purpose early gave character and efficiency to Western monasteries, and prepared them for the literary and industrial usefulness which followed in the wane of the first frenzy, and which made monasticism, in spite of itself, a powerful factor in the evolution of modern civilization. This systematizing was due to the efforts of Ambrose, Athanasius, Gregory the Great, but more especially to those of Benedict of Nursia.

The first known ceremonial recognition by the Church of a professed nun is the case of Marcellina. On Christmas Day, perhaps of the year 354, she received a veil

from the hands of Pope Liberius, and made her vows before a large congregation gathered in the church of Saint Peter, at Rome. Saint Ambrose, her brother, has preserved for us a summary of the sermon preached by the bishop on the occasion. It consists of an earnest but not very convincing—so it would seem to modern ears—exhortation to abstinence from worldly pleasure and to perseverance in virginity. Marcellina continued to dwell in private in her own home, for it had not yet become customary for professed virgins to take up their residence in a common abode. The inauguration of this new departure had begun, however, as is shown by passages in the work of Saint Ambrose on virginity, which he dedicated to his sister. In the eleventh chapter of the first book, he says: "Some one may say, you are always singing the praise of virgins. What shall I do who am always singing them and have no success (in persuading them to the consecrated life)? But this is not my fault. Then, too, virgins come from Placentia to be consecrated, or from Bononia and Mauritania, in order to receive the veil here. I treat the matter here, and persuade those who are elsewhere. If this be so, let me treat the subject elsewhere, that I may persuade you.

"Behold how sweet is the fruit of modesty, which has sprung up even in the affections of barbarians. Virgins, coming from the greatest distance on both sides of Mauritania, desire to be consecrated here; and though all the family be in bonds, yet modesty cannot be bound. She who mourns over the hardship of slavery professes to own an eternal kingdom.

"And what shall I say of the virgins of Bononia, a fertile band of chastity, who, forsaking worldly delights, inhabit the sanctuary of virginity? Though not of the sex which lives in common, attaining in their common

chastity to the number of twenty, leaving their parents' dwellings, they press into the houses of Christ; at one time singing spiritual songs, they provide their sustenance by labor, and seek with their hands the supplies for their liberal charity."

So, then, it is evident that as early as the latter part of the fourth century communities of nuns began to live in their own religious houses. As yet, however, the inmates of these asylums of chastity were answerable only to themselves for the faithfulness with which they fulfilled their vows. There was no organized order, no recognized rule; each virgin observed her profession according as she interpreted the terms thereof. The Church exercised no well-defined disciplinary authority over these convents; of course, if a professed nun scandalously repudiated her vows, she could be excommunicated, but the efficacy of this punishment was conditioned entirely by the degree of horror with which the woman viewed the forfeiture of ecclesiastical privileges. It was not before the time of Gregory that the Church became able to enforce its judgments. When all the world became Christian, then the individual again lost his freedom of thought in relation to religious matters; then, through its alliance with the secular arm, the Church gained the power to sternly constrain its recalcitrant children. This was brought about by the political advantages gained by Gregory, and by Saint Benedict's gifts of organization.

Saint Benedict was the father of Western organized monasticism; he not only founded an order to which many religious houses already existing united themselves, but he established a rule for their government, which was adopted as the rule for monastic life by all such orders which existed in the Church down to the time of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic. What Benedict did for the

monks, his sister Scholastica—who, being a woman, has received far less mention—accomplished for the nuns. Through her efforts, under the direction and advice of her brother, greater dignity and weight were given to the female side of monasticism.

We know that Benedict was born at Nursia, in the province of Spoleto, in the year 480; whether Scholastica was older or younger than her more famous brother is not said. Their parents were respectable people, possessed of sufficient means to enable them to give their children a good education, and to take up temporarily their residence in Rome for that purpose.

While at Rome, Benedict became enamored of the idea of devoting himself to religion; and in order to get away from the moral dangers of the city, he fled from his school and his parents to a small village called Effide, about two miles from Subiaco. His nurse—Cyrilla—was his accomplice and companion in this adventure, and for this she has received her due meed of honor in the legends which have attached to the life of the great founder. As an example of these legends, and as an illustration of their historic value, we will notice one story. One day, Cyrilla accidentally broke a stone sieve which she had borrowed for the purpose of making the youthful saint some bread. Compassionating her distress, Benedict placed the two pieces in position and then prayed over them. To the great joy of Cyrilla and the no small wonderment of the rustics, they became firmly cemented together and the sieve was again made whole. This marvellous utensil was hung over the church door, where it remained for many years an irrefutable proof of the power of monastic holiness.

Later on, Saint Benedict established twelve monasteries in the neighborhood, at last settling at Monte Casino, not far from the place where his sister, Saint Scholastica, also

presided over a colony of religious women. Here were formulated and adopted the regulations which for so many years governed these religious recluses, both male and female. Three virtues comprised the whole of the Benedictine discipline: celibate seclusion, extended to the cultivation of silence as far as the exigences of the convent would permit; humility to the very last degree; and obedience to superiors even—so said the law—when impossibilities were commanded. The effect designed was to concentrate the entire thought of the recluse upon himself. Yet, idleness on the part of its subjects was far from the purpose of this discipline. All the waking hours—which were by far the greater part of the time—of these nuns were devoted to the worship of God, reading, and manual labor. Besides the essential work of their own household, the nuns occupied themselves in spinning, weaving, and manufacturing clothing, which was distributed in charity; thus their time was not wholly spent in vain. They also wove and embroidered the beautiful tapestries and hangings which ornamented the churches, and, in course of time, developed a textile art which was one of the glories of the Middle Ages. With the time at their disposal, it is no wonder that the ancient convents could exhibit histories of the Creation, done in stitchwork. In imitation of the Psalmist, seven times a day the nuns met in their chapel for prayer and praise. Sloth was not possible with them; for they were obliged to waken for matins very early in the morning, before the breaking of day, even in summer, and this after having risen for a short service of praise at midnight.

Abstinence from the flesh of four-footed animals was perpetually and universally enforced. Fowls were allowed on festival occasions; but the regular diet was vegetable broth and bread. A large part of the year was a prescribed

fast during which one meal a day was made to suffice and that at even. No nun was permitted to speak of or consider anything as her own, not even a girdle or any part of her dress. At first, when members of the order became delinquent in their duties, only such penalties as sequestration from the common table or the chapel, with expulsion from the order in case of incorrigibility, could be enforced. But, as the Church's disciplinary hand grew heavier on the lives of mankind, severer punishments were adopted, which contumacy served only to render yet more cruel, even to lifelong solitary incarceration.

But the most stringent rule of monasticism, as regulated by Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica, was that in relation to the sexes. According to it, they were required to treat each other as natural, irreconcilable enemies. Communion, even between those of the closest kin, was almost entirely interdicted. The two founders, brother and sister though they were, and united not only in a perfect harmony of disposition and affection, but in devotion to the same life purpose, saw each other but once a year. "There is something striking," says Milman, "in the attachment of the brother and sister, the human affection struggling with the hard spirit of monasticism. Saint Scholastica was a female Benedict—equally devout, equally powerful in attracting and ruling recluses of her own sex, the remote foundress of convents almost as numerous as those of her brother's rule." We are indebted to Gregory the Great for the narration of some interesting incidents in the lives of these two saints. The only one which our space will permit, and perhaps the one which best illustrates the spirit that governed them in the hard and self-denying path which they elected to walk, is the account of their last meeting. Though the convent was situated not far from the monastery, though they were brother and sister, aged,

and devoted to the same holy aims, they met but once a year, for so said the rule. Scholastica was dying, and the time came for Benedict to pay his annual visit. Evening had come all too quickly, for the few hours had rapidly passed in the delight of spiritual communion. Scholastica entreated her brother to remain in the convent for that one night, as it was likely that he would never again see her alive. But not even sisterly affection could turn the monk from the rigid observance of his rules, one of which was that neither he nor any of his brethren should spend a night outside of the monastery. As he was preparing to bid her farewell, she bent her head for a few moments in profound prayer. Suddenly the sky, which had hitherto been clear and serene, became overcast, the vivid lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, and the rain swept down in torrents; heaven had come to the aged nun's assistance. "The Lord have mercy on you, my sister!" said Benedict, "what have you done?" "You," she replied, "have rejected my prayers; but the Lord hath not. Go now, if you can!" Her intercession was rewarded with triumph, and they passed the night in holy communion. Three days afterward, Benedict saw the soul of Scholastica soaring to heaven in the shape of a dove, whither, after a very little while, he followed her.

As it is with all social movements, after a while the glory of the initial purity of purpose which marked the inception of Benedictine monasticism began to wane; its singleness of aim became diverted; its disingenuousness was replaced by sophisticated evasion of its rule. The monasteries and convents became wealthy; ways were discovered by which their discipline could be softened without formally abrogating the rule; and events rendered it advisable to legislate that houses for nuns and for monks should not be erected in close proximity.

The time came when the abbess took her place among the high dignitaries of the Church, and the office grew to be one, not only of great spiritual influence, but of enviable social standing. Even in the days of Gregory the Great, who, though he lost no opportunity to magnify the papal office, was a man of intense spiritual nature and powerful moral character, the leaders of female monasticism began to realize the possibilities of ecclesiastical officialdom. The honors of an abbess were found to be a not altogether unsatisfactory substitute for the undesired or the unattainable glories of the world. It was at least something to be addressed in correspondence by the great bishop of Rome as a coworker; and there are many letters extant written by Gregory to abbesses in various parts of the Western world. These furnish us with sidelights upon the personnel, the duties, customs, and standing of the women who were placed in charge of these convents.

In a letter written to Thalassia, abbess of the convent which Brunehaut founded in the city of Autun, Saint Gregory sets forth the privileges and the manner of electing a woman to that office. He says: "We indulge, grant and confirm by decree of our present authority, privileges as follows: Ordaining that no king, no bishop, no one endowed with any dignity whatsoever, shall have power, under show of any cause or occasion whatsoever, to diminish or take away, or apply to his own uses, or grant as if to other pious uses for excuse of his own avarice, anything of what has been given to the monastery by the above-written king's children, or of what shall in future be bestowed on it by any others whatever of their own possessions. But all things that have been there offered, or may come to be offered, we will to be possessed by thee, as well as those who shall succeed thee in thy office and place, from the present time inviolate and without

disturbance, provided thou apply them in all ways to the uses of those for whose sustenance and government they have been granted." The use and benefit of papal supremacy is beginning to be seen. This cumbrous legal enactment conferred upon Thalassia a life lease and freehold in the property of her convent, as secure as the tithes of his parish are to an English incumbent.

In this same letter, which was written some time in the latter part of the sixth century, there is also a clause concerning the election of an abbess. There is to be nothing crafty or secret about it. The election is to be conducted in the fear of God. The king is to choose such a woman as will meet with the approval of the nuns; she is then to be ordained by the bishop. This all goes to show that, even in those early times, for a woman who was willing to forego the attractions of married life, or was unwilling to accept its cares, the position of abbess was one which might well stir the ambitious. But, however that might be, in the same letter, Gregory, who evidently knew the weaknesses of human nature, prevented the questionable methods which the ambitious might be tempted to adopt. "No one," he says, "of the kings, no one of the priests, or any one else in person or by proxy, shall dare to accept anything in gold, or in any kind of consideration whatever, for the ordination of such abbess, or for any causes whatever pertaining to this monastery, and that the same abbess presume not to give anything on account of her ordination, lest by such occasion what is offered or has been offered to places of piety should be consumed. And inasmuch as many occasions for the deception of religious women are sought out, as is said, in your parts by bad men, we ordain that an abbess of this same monastery shall in no wise be deprived or deposed unless in case of criminality requiring it. Hence, it is necessary that if

any complaint of this kind should arise against her, not only the bishop of the city of Autun should examine the case, but that he should call to his assistance six other of his fellow-bishops, and so fully investigate the matter to the end that, all judging with one accord, a strict canonical decision may either smite if guilty, or absolve her if innocent." A law against any wrong always predicates the existence of that fault. Hence, the prohibitions we have quoted could not have been of unknown occurrence among the fellow abbesses of Thalassia.

Through other letters we learn that it was in contradiction of monastic rule for those embracing that life to retain property of their own after profession, or even the power of disposing of it by will; it became the property of the convent. It appears, also, that if a nun were transferred from one monastery to another, or if, as sometimes happened, a consecrated virgin living at home had lapsed and was therefore sent to a monastery, her property always went to the convent in which she at that present time resided. This was so strictly enforced that when one Sirica, abbess at Caralis, made a will and distributed her property, Gregory ordered that it be restored to the monastery without dispute or evasion. As many women of position were induced to become nuns, it is easy to be seen how the convents quickly acquired great wealth.

All the abbesses did not consider themselves slavishly bound to follow the uniform rule. In the letter just mentioned, the same Sirica is seen to have manifested a refreshing independence in relation to other matters in regard to which a woman does not take kindly to outside interference. Gregory says: "And when we enquired of the Solicitude of your Holiness why you endured that property belonging to the monastery should be detained by others, our common son Epiphanius, your archpresbyter,

being present before us, replied that the said abbess had up to the day of her death refused to wear the monastic dress, but had continued in the use of such dresses as are used by the presbyteresses of that place. To this the aforesaid Gavina replied that the practice had come to be almost lawful from custom, alleging that the abbess who had been before the above-mentioned Sirica had used such dresses. When, then, we begun to feel no small doubt with regard to the character of the dresses, it appeared necessary for us to consider with our legal advisers, as well as with the other learned men of this city, what was to be done with regard to law. And they, having considered the matter, answered that, after an abbess had been solemnly ordained by the bishop and had presided in the government of a monastery for many years until the end of her life, the character of her dress might attach blame to the bishop for having allowed it so to be, but still could not prejudice the monastery." Those "presbyteresses" whose attire Sirica considered she had ample right to copy, were the wives of presbyters who had been married before ordination. It is all very trivial; and yet there is to be recognized such a touch of naturalness about this abbess of thirteen centuries ago that it is worthy of remark. And it must be confessed that Sirica has our entire approval as we fancy we see her going calmly about the duties of her office, while Pope Gregory of Rome is calling together his legal advisers to know what shall be done about her dress, she all the while determined that she is going to array herself in exactly that style which, to her independent mind, seems most befitting.

When, however, serious faults on the part of nuns had to be dealt with, Gregory possessed, even in that early day, the power as well as the will to inflict punishment of a severe nature. Moreover, the Church had become

what Rome was in the time of the emperors,—so universal and thoroughly organized that culprits could not hope to flee beyond the reach of the disciplinary hand. Petronilla, a nun of Lucania, had given way to the weakness of nature and the seducements of Agnellus, the son of a bishop. Taking the property which Petronilla had brought to the monastery, and also that which the father of Agnellus had given to the institution, they fled to Sicily in the hope of there enjoying love and affluence in their mutual companionship and that of their child. But Gregory's supervision was as far-reaching as was the power of his hand. He writes to Cyprian, Deacon and Rector of Sicily, "to cause the aforesaid man, and the above-named woman, to be summarily brought before thee, and institute a most thorough investigation into the case. And, if thou shouldest find it to be as reported to us, determine an affair defiled by so many iniquities with the utmost severity of expurgation; to the end that both strict retribution may overtake the man, who has regarded neither his own nor her condition, and that, she having been first punished and consigned to a monastery under penance, all the property that had been taken away from the above-named place, with all its fruits and accessions, may be restored." What the exact nature of the penance inflicted was we do not know; but in another place, speaking of nuns who had been detected in the same fault, the great bishop orders that they "afford an example of the more rigorous kind of discipline, such as may inspire fear in others." The Church had already acquired the power to enforce its artificial morality, which power it vigorously employed on those with whom it could afford to be at no pains to ingratiate itself.

Rigid disciplinarian as he was, and zealous in his labors to aggrandize the Church, Gregory was careful not to

allow the privileges of monasticism to be pushed to the endangering, as he thought, of the moral welfare of those whom it concerned. The law was that if either a husband or a wife decided to devote himself or herself to the monastic life, the marriage bonds might be severed without the consent of the other partner. But in a letter which he wrote to a notary of Panormus and sent by the hand of a woman named Agathosa, he refers to the latter's claim that her husband had entered a monastery without her consent. He instructs the notary "to investigate the matter by diligent enquiry, so as to see whether it may not be the case that the man's profession was with her consent, or that she herself had promised to change her state. And should it be found to be so, see to his remaining in the monastery, and compel her to change her state, as she had promised. If, however, neither of these things is the case, and you do not find that the aforesaid woman has committed any crime of fornication on account of which it is lawful for a man to leave his wife, then, lest his profession should possibly be an occasion of perdition to the wife left behind in the world, we desire thee, without any excuse allowed, to restore her husband to her, even though he should be already tonsured." It is quite noticeable that the bishop would much prefer that the woman follow her husband's example and embrace the monastic life. It is possible that Gregory, in addition to his constant zeal in gaining recruits for this vocation, realized, personally inexperienced though he was in such matters, that the wife would find but cold comfort in the enforced embraces of a husband who preferred the monks of a religious house to her own society. Still, even in the case of a professed nun who had been forcibly compelled to marry against her will, he did not suggest that the matrimonial bonds should be severed without the consent of the enterprising husband,

but only that she should have the right, after providing for her children, to devote the residue of her property to the Church to which she would gladly have sacrificed her whole life.

In those parts of the Christian world to which the authority of Pope Gregory did not extend, monasticism showed some peculiarities that were very dissimilar to the Benedictine rule. Perhaps the most striking of these is to be seen in the ancient British Church, that apostolic foundation which, until after the Saxon conquest, had never come under the influence of the Roman See. At Whitby, in Yorkshire, Saint Hild, the daughter of a king, reared a monastery which included, under her own personal government, both men and women. In adjoining buildings, nuns and monks lived in contemplative retirement, their life and studies superintended by this gifted woman, whose wisdom was such that her counsel was eagerly sought by the highest nobles in the land. Her institution was a training school for bishops and priests, as well as a haven of religious recreation for women of the world. That her rule was salutary, and this combination not prejudicial to good living, seems to be proved by the fact that she included among those who were trained under her supervision John of Beverly, who was as famous for his holiness as for his learning.

Thus, monasticism became an increasingly powerful factor in the social life of that far distant age. The importance of the institution lay in its complete universality. Wherever was found the Christian Church, there also was the religious house, a harbor of sanctity, presided over by an abbess chosen for her piety and strength of mind, filled with women who were not loath to forsake the pleasures of the world for the love of peace and divine contemplation. From the Eternal City where Gregory

was reviving in religious guise that power which for so many centuries had dominated the world, and where alone was retained what remained of a departed civilization, to Streonshealh where Hild, daughter of barbaric chiefs, reared her abbey on the summit of the dark cliffs of Whitby, looking out over the gloom of the Northern Sea, these convents represented what was then considered as the acme of feminine attainment.

That feminine monasticism had its uses and conferred its benefits it would be an absurdity to deny. Despite the falsity of the unnatural moral theory which supplied too largely its motive, monasticism was an outward and visible sign of that human evolution which makes for progress. The selfishness of its spiritual aims was in accord with the strenuous individualism of that new age; its dualistic theory of nature was at least a revolt from the brutal animalism of the day. Moreover, it furnished the only opportunity that human life then afforded for calm and concentrated reflection on any subject save eating, breeding, and killing. The monastery was the bridge by which the salvage from the dissolution of ancient civilization was carried over the Dark Ages to the Renaissance.

When we seek for the peculiar benefits monasticism provided for women, they are found to be two. The universally recognized sanctity of the cloister provided, in an age of exceeding brutality, a sanctuary where woman might take refuge, and where something at least of the spirituality of her nature might be neither outraged nor obliterated. It may be that, after all unfavorable judgments have been passed, if it had not been for the veneration of cloistered virginity, in so rude an age the world might have forgotten what modesty and purity are. Also, it is not favorable to the highest development of womanhood to be absolutely restricted to the one vocation of

marriage. If, to-day, women are not better wives, they surely are more self-respecting for the fact that there is a possibility of their being independent and yet remain unmarried. What business now does for woman, in the olden times was done by the female monastery: it provided examples of the sex, who were glorious, and yet unmarried. The woman crossed in love, or the girl threatened with a union repugnant to her feelings, could say: "I will be a nun," and thereby gain the highest esteem of the world.

Chapter VII

Women Who Witnessed the Fall of Rome

VII

WOMEN WHO WITNESSED THE FALL OF ROME

THE Empire had forfeited its right to take its title from the ancient city on the Tiber long before its final dismemberment. Constantine had removed his court and capital to the Bosphorus, and there the metropolis of the East remained. The Western emperors established their courts in various parts of Europe, their locations being usually determined by the exigences of rivalry and the territorial success of their usurpation. Roman citizenship had become universal and at the same time meaningless: it represented no privileges other than the bare fact that its owner was not a slave. The freedom it conferred was only relative and, to a very great extent, merely theoretical; practically, all were the slaves of the emperor. The race of Romulus had degenerated into a pretentious but pusillanimous aristocracy, who desired no title to glory save that found in pedigree. There was not left in them sufficient virility to set up, much less to maintain, an emperor of their own race; their rulers were of barbarian extraction. The Roman army was a cosmopolitan aggregation, in which Italy was the least represented of the provinces. Ammianus Marcellinus, the historian, writing late in the fourth century, says: "The modern nobles measure their rank and consequence according to the loftiness of their chariots and the weighty magnificence of

their dress. Their long robes of silk and purple float in the wind; and as they are agitated by art or accident, they occasionally discover the under-garments, the rich tunics, embroidered with the figures of various animals." Gibbon notes that the more pious coxcombs substituted the figure of some favorite saint. Ammianus goes on to describe how, "followed by a train of fifty servants, and tearing up the pavement, they move along the streets with the same impetuous speed as if they travelled with post-horses; and the example of the senators is boldly imitated by the matrons and ladies, whose covered carriages are continually driving round the immense space of the city and suburbs. Whenever these persons of high distinction condescend to visit the public baths, they assume, on their entrance, a tone of loud and insolent command, and appropriate to their exclusive use the conveniences which were designed for the Roman people. If, in these places of mixed and general resort, they meet any of the infamous ministers of their pleasures, they express their affection by a tender embrace; while they proudly disdain the salutation of their fellow-citizens who are not permitted to aspire above the honor of kissing their hands or their knees. As soon as they have indulged themselves in the refreshment of the bath, they resume their rings and the other ensigns of their dignity, select from their private wardrobe (of the finest linen, and of a quantity such as might suffice for a dozen persons), the garments most agreeable to their fancy, and maintain till their departure the same haughty demeanor. . . . The acquisition of knowledge seldom engages the attention of nobles, who abhor the fatigue and disdain the advantages of study. The libraries which they have inherited from their fathers are secluded, like dreary sepulchres, from the light of day. The art of obtaining the signature of a favorable

testament, and sometimes of hastening the moment of its execution, is perfectly understood; and it has happened that in the same house, though in different apartments, a husband and a wife, with the laudable design of over-reaching each other, have summoned their respective lawyers, to declare, at the same time, their mutual but contradictory wishes."

It is probable that Ammianus, with the disdain which students are apt to affect toward the unphilosophic multitude, has exaggerated the disregard of the Roman nobility for books. We have seen that many of the female friends of Jerome were most ardent lovers of literature; and the Christian Fathers constantly evince an expectation of finding among their female followers an enthusiastic reading public. These women read theological works; it is not unreasonable to suppose that their less heavenly-minded sisters were as assiduous students of the classical secular books.

We have the names and somewhat of the history of a few of the women who lived in this period, but they are all from the highest and most conspicuous society. History loves a shining mark. If the chroniclers of the time had favored us with a detailed descriptive account of the life of the common people, it would have been of more value than that of many nobles.

The population of Rome at this time has been estimated at between one million two hundred thousand and two million. This, of course, includes the vast army of slaves, which remained undiminished after the change of the national religion. But there was also a great horde of free, poor plebeians, who were the perpetual paupers of the government. These lived in the same careless, indigent idleness as had the same class in preceding centuries. They inhabited tenements not unlike those known to the

great cities of modern times. These houses were of several stories, each tenement sheltering a number of families. That they were exceedingly uncomfortable is easy to believe, seeing that even the wealthy of ancient times, notwithstanding the architectural grandeur which they could command, were ignorant of the ordinary modern domestic conveniences. The free working class of the present day was then practically unknown: that place was taken by the slaves. So the poverty-stricken Roman citizen was both necessarily and willingly unemployed. Generally, however, corn, wine, and oil were supplied him with little or no expense to himself. Each morning, at a set time, his wife would repair to a prescribed station in the district, and there, on showing a citizen's ticket, she would receive a three-pound loaf of bread. So indulgent was the government, that it ground and baked the allowance which at one time was made in the shape of corn. During five months in the year there was also distributed, to the poorer people, an allowance of pork; the annual consumption of this kind of meat in Rome was three million six hundred and twenty-eight thousand pounds. When the populace had clamored before Augustus for free wine as well as bread, that wise and firm ruler reminded them that since his friend Agrippa had brought into the city a bountiful supply of pure water, no Roman need complain of thirst. But those emperors who denuded Roman citizenship entirely of its right of suffrage yet had an interest in keeping the populace quiet and contented; hence, in the fourth century there existed public cellars from whence was dispensed, at a small cost to the inhabitants of Rome, the fermented vintage of Campania.

It was also necessary, the people being idle, that they should be amused. There were the magnificent public baths where they could while away the time in luxury and

gossip. But the amusement with which the multitude was never satiated was found in the exhibitions of the circus. On special occasions, many would sleep in the porticoes near by, in order to be the first on hand to obtain seats in the morning. The immense amphitheatre would accommodate four hundred thousand. Christianity abolished the gladiatorial combat of former times; but there still remained the exciting and perilous chariot race and the hunting and fighting of wild beasts. Nor had Christianity been able to purify the stage to any great extent. The Muses of Tragedy and a statelier comedy were entirely abandoned for licentious farces. No fewer than three thousand female dancers were occupied in the theatres of Rome. At a time of famine when all strangers were banished from the city, and also the teachers of the liberal arts, these dancers were exempted by the edict.

The people of Rome were afforded an additional source of interest in the ecclesiastical contentions which were aroused by the ambitions and the theological disputes of the clergy. Before the close of the fourth century the bishopric of Rome had become an office more fitted to be sought after by the worldly-minded than by the imitator of the humble Galilean fishermen. Its vacation was the signal for a contention in which rival candidates were not averse to employing the violence of the common people as well as the influence of noble Christian ladies. Ammianus describes how "the ardor of Damasus and Ursinus to seize the episcopal seat surpassed the ordinary measure of human ambition. They contended with the rage of party; the quarrel was maintained by the wounds and death of their followers; and the prefect, unable to resist or appease the tumult, was constrained, by superior violence, to retire into the suburbs. Damasus prevailed: the well-disputed victory remained on the side of his faction; one

hundred and thirty-seven dead bodies were found in the Basilica of Sicininus, where the Christians held their religious assemblies; and it was long before the angry minds of the people resumed their accustomed tranquillity. When I consider the splendor of the capital, I am not astonished that so valuable a prize should inflame the desires of ambitious men, and produce the fiercest and most obstinate contests. The successful candidate is confident that he will be enriched by the offerings of matrons; that, as soon as his dress is composed with becoming care and elegance, he may proceed in his chariot through the streets of Rome; and that the sumptuousness of the imperial table will not equal the profuse and delicate entertainments provided by the taste and expense of the Roman bishops."

The practice of taking advantage of the charity—or the sentiment—of wealthy ladies had become so prevalent among the clergy that the government had been compelled to regard it as an abuse to be severely legislated against. By his enemies, Bishop Damasus himself was nicknamed *Auriscalpius Matronarum* (the ladies' ear scratcher). An edict on the subject was addressed by Valentinian to this bishop who was directed to have it read in the churches of his diocese. It must have been a humiliating document for the clerics of the time to listen to in the presence of their congregations. It admonished them not to frequent the houses of virgins and widows. The habit had become popular for wealthy and devout ladies to choose some monk or priest as their individual and private spiritual director. That the confidence reposed in the latter was often abused is indicated by the edict which prohibited him from profiting by any gift or legacy from his spiritual protégée; the same abuse is also frankly acknowledged in the writings of the Fathers. As we have seen in the case of Jerome and Paula, such a relationship might be

perfectly innocent, though somewhat hysterical. Human nature is the same in all ages; and, given a woman whose sentimental nature predisposed her to seek an indemnification in spiritual companionship for those ordinary delights which, by pious vows, she had denied herself; an ecclesiastic, frail in principle, but apt to cloak his designs with the sanctity of ghostly affection and disinterested charity, and the result is not unlikely to be disastrous to the reputation of the lady and, also, to the expectations of her heirs. The law of Valentinian, forbidding these women to make clerics their legatees, precluded the former from the comfort of an ostentatious guaranty of their piety, and stigmatized the disinterestedness of the latter.

Such, then, was the condition of the Roman Empire at the time when the causes leading to its decline were nearing their culmination. After Julian's death under the assassin's hand, Jovian followed in a brief reign. Then Valentinian came to the throne. In this emperor is witnessed that astonishing mixture of vice and virtue, barbarous cruelty and Christian belief which characterized that period. It was an age of bitter warfare; every human force was engaged in deadly contention; both the Church and the Empire were fighting for their lives. The latter could scarcely keep off the hordes of barbarians which were swarming and surging upon its borders, and at times it seemed as if the former had quite succumbed to the heresy of Arianism. It was the most deadly battle that the Church has ever had to wage. After the question of who should rule, theology was the most important item in the politics of the time. Varying metaphysical definitions which baffled the acumen of the wisest philosophers were confidently espoused in a spirit of partisanship by mechanics and ignorant persons of both sexes. It was the difference of an iota—*homoousios* or *homoiousios*.

Valentinian favored orthodoxy, not because of sturdy convictions (he said it was a question for bishops), but because the Church in the West was mainly Catholic; but in Justina, his wife, the Arians were compensated by a powerful champion. Socrates, the historian, describes the marriage of Justina as having taken place under most remarkable circumstances. The story is interesting, though of somewhat doubtful veracity: "Justus, the father of Justina, who had been governor of Picenum under the reign of Constantius, had a dream in which he seemed to himself to bring forth the imperial purple out of his right side. When this dream had been told to many persons, it at length came to the knowledge of Constantius, who conjecturing it to be a presage that a descendant of Justus would become emperor, caused him to be assassinated. Justina, being thus bereft of her father, still continued a virgin. Some time after, she became known to Severa, wife of the Emperor Valentinian, and had frequent intercourse with the empress, until their intimacy at length grew to such an extent that they were accustomed to bathe together. When Severa saw Justina in the bath she was greatly struck with the beauty of the virgin, and spoke of her to the emperor, saying that the daughter of Justus was so lovely a creature and possessed of such symmetry of form, that she herself, though a woman, was altogether charmed with her. The emperor, treasuring this description by his wife in his own mind, considered with himself how he could espouse Justina, without repudiating Severa, who had borne him Gratian, whom he had created Augustus a short time before. He accordingly framed a law, and caused it to be published throughout all the cities, by which any man was permitted to have two lawful wives. The law was promulgated and he married Justina, by whom he had Valentinian the younger, and

three daughters—Justa, Grata, and Galla. . . . Galla was afterwards married to Theodosius the Great, who had by her a daughter named Placidia."

This story, romantic as it is, lacks all the hallmarks of credibility. In the first place, there is absolutely no trace of this remarkable law either in the codes or in other historians. Furthermore, the ancient Church was more severely opposed to bigamy and polygamy than it was to any other deviation from common morals. Also the Roman law strongly discountenanced plurality in marriage. Moreover, we have it on the authority of Ammianus, who is a most trustworthy witness, that Valentinian was remarkable for his chastity, both at home and abroad. Also in contradiction to what Socrates relates, Zosimus asserts that Justina had already been married to Magnentius, and that the emperor was joined to her in matrimony after the death of Severa, his first wife. Either this latter statement must be accepted as the fact in the case, or we must believe that the first empress was divorced, a procedure that was certainly not difficult and was extremely customary for the rulers of Rome. What is probably the truth of the matter is that this story of Justina being the partner of Valentinian in bigamy was a malicious invention; possibly the discredit of its promulgation should be laid at the door of some of the unscrupulous among the orthodox, who were incensed at her support of heresy.

It was customary for the empress to accompany her imperial husband in his military expeditions about the Empire. Apart from other considerations, this was necessary to her safety and that of her offspring. Conspirators are apt to perpetrate their designs in the absence of the ruler against whom they are plotting; and in that case, the legitimate successor, with his protectors—if within reach—is the first victim of the ambition or precaution of

his father's enemies. Consequently, it was usual for the emperors to take their families with them even in the most distant journeys. The advantage of this was illustrated in the death of Valentinian. He had marched against the Quadi who were vexing the frontier on the bank of the Danube. In his customary cruel manner, he put to death all who fell into his power, murdering even the women and children. The desperate people sent envoys begging for peace and forgiveness, but Valentinian broke out upon them in one of those paroxysms of rage to which he was subject, and, in the midst of his terrible invectives, ruptured a blood vessel in his lungs, which caused his death upon the spot.

At the moment, Justina was occupying a palace at a short distance from Bregetio, where the death of her husband occurred. Gratian, the son of Severa, had already been invested by his father with the imperial purple; but the court ministers, inspired probably with the thought of those advantages which such men enjoy during the reign of an infant, immediately planned to exalt to the throne of Valentinian the latter's four-year-old son, who bore the same name. Justina was sent for and placed by the ministers on a regal platform facing the troops. She held her young son in her arms; and the picture of a beautiful woman, endowed both with the fruit and the graces of motherhood, had its never failing effect of stirring the soldiers to an outburst of chivalric enthusiasm. The infant was there and then invested with the purple and the insignia of empire, which, it may be added, he never wore with greater effect than in the hour when his puny infant form was first arrayed in them. Whatever real influence his name had in the government was wielded by Justina. But Gratian was emperor. He it was who commanded the army and ruled the Empire, while Justina

held court and engaged in petty domestic politics at Milan and Sirmium. One thing is certain and is remarkable enough to be mentioned—the two empress-mothers, Severa and Justina, lived as co-widows in that mutual harmony which Socrates would have us believe characterized them as co-wives.

Perhaps the principal event of the life of Justina was her controversy with Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who was one of the noblest men of the ancient Church, and who, by his courage and integrity, set an example for all succeeding bishops. Contemning the pomps and vanities of the world, he did not disdain to use the powers of his office for the political advantage of either the Church or the state; so, when Maximus usurped the imperial privilege in the Gallic provinces, Ambrose was sent as an ambassador by Justina to beg the clemency of the new emperor for herself and her son. Maximus reigned in the far West, while at his sufferance Valentinian II. was emperor in Italy.

While this young emperor—who died at the age of twenty-one—reigned, his mother ruled. Justina, however, appears to have been an easy-going woman. She does not seem to have been possessed of much ambition, and there is no indication that she interfered very strenuously in the affairs of the Empire. She found herself in the position which she occupied, and endeavored to preserve herself and her son in safety. Tolerance was marked in all that she did, and there was a very evident willingness to leave others unmolested, provided she and her son were allowed to maintain their position in security. Of course, while they retained the names of empress-mother and emperor, their real power was but slight. Valentinian II. was never more than a boy, and Justina possessed no military command. Nevertheless, it does seem as if she were endowed with some real ability, or she could not have maintained

herself in comparative security during seventeen years of such troublous and changeful times.

Justina's controversy with Saint Ambrose seems to have been the one point on which she had serious difficulty with her subjects, and this appears to have affected only the people of Milan. Gibbon, in his inimitable manner, thus describes the incident: "The government of Italy and of the young emperor naturally devolved to his mother Justina, a woman of beauty and spirit, but who, in the midst of an orthodox people, had the misfortune of professing the Arian heresy, which she endeavored to instil into the mind of her son. Justina was persuaded that a Roman emperor might claim, in his own dominions, the public exercise of his religion; and she proposed to the archbishop, as a moderate and reasonable concession, that he should resign the use of a single church, either in the city or suburbs of Milan. But the conduct of Ambrose was governed by very different principles. The palaces of earth might indeed belong to Cæsar, but the churches were the houses of God; and, within the limits of his diocese, he himself, as the lawful successor of the apostles, was the only minister of God. The privileges of Christianity, temporal as well as spiritual, were confined to the true believers; and the mind of Ambrose was satisfied that his own theological opinions were the standard of truth and orthodoxy. The archbishop, who refused to hold any conference or negotiation with the instruments of Satan, declared with modest firmness his resolution to die a martyr rather than to yield to the impious sacrilege; and Justina, who resented the refusal as an act of insolence and rebellion, hastily determined to exert the imperial prerogative of her son."

Under ordinary circumstances, in a like situation, it is very probable that the bishop's reiterated desire for

martyrdom would have been gratified. But Ambrose was secure, owing to the intense orthodoxy of all Justina's subjects. In an attack on religion, there was no one to carry out her commands. "As she desired to perform her public devotions on the approaching festival of Easter, Ambrose was ordered to appear before the council. He obeyed the summons with the respect of a faithful subject, but he was followed, without his consent, by an innumerable people: they pressed, with impetuous zeal, against the gates of the palace; and the affrighted ministers of Valentinian, instead of pronouncing a sentence of exile on the archbishop of Milan, humbly requested that he would interpose his authority, to protect the person of the emperor, and to restore the tranquillity of the capital."

In the end the bishop prevailed. There are extant certain letters written by the saint to his sister, Marcellina, in which he describes the circumstances of this dispute with Justina. He recounts how soldiers were sent to occupy the church which the empress desired for her own heretical use, and how they fraternized with the Catholic people who refused to give up the sacred building. The bishop asserts that in the midst of all this tumult and public inharmony, he gave utterance only to "freer groans." But there is evidence in his own letters that Ambrose took a more active and also a more effective course than mere pious groaning; indeed, he showed a remarkable boldness of decision, as well as astuteness, in his political methods. He met the occasion with a sermon on the trials of Job, which could hardly have aroused pleasant reflections in the mind of Justina. "But Job was tried by accumulated tidings of evils, he was also tried by his wife, who said, 'Speak a word against God and die.' You see what terrible things are of a sudden stirred up, the Goths, armed men, the heathen. . . . You observe

what was commanded when the order was given: 'Surrender the Basilica!' that is, speak a word against God and die. . . . So, then, we are prepared by the imperial commands, but are strengthened by the words of Scripture, which replies: 'Thou hast spoken as one of the foolish.' That temptation then is no light one, for we know that those temptations are more severe which arise through women. For even Adam was overthrown by Eve, whereby it came to pass that he erred from the divine commandments. . . . Why should I relate that Jezebel, also, persecuted Elijah after a bloodthirsty fashion? Or that Herodias caused John the Baptist to be slain? . . . Of women change follows on change, their hatreds alternate, their falsehoods vary, elders assemble together, wrong done to the emperor is made a pretence."

This homiletic punishment of the empress by the intrepid saint was opportunely followed by the discovery of certain holy and potent relics. By means of these, the sick were healed and the blind restored, and thus the people were convinced that God was on their side. The empress derided these marvels with an incredulity which would do credit to the present time; but she was compelled to take the wise counsel of Theodosius and surrender her purpose. She took her revenge, however, by publishing a decree that the Arian worship should be lawful throughout the dominions of her son, Valentinian II.

During this time, Maximus, the usurper of Gaul, had acted toward the empress and her feeble son with apparent friendliness; but he had not in reality set bounds to the range of his ambition. In 377, his first hostile operations commenced. Justina was not prepared for warfare. She fled with the emperor and her daughter, Galla, to Theodosius, the great ruler of the East, who first married Galla, and then took up successfully the cause of

her mother and her brother. Of this marriage was born Placidia whose strange adventures we shall shortly relate. It is probable that Justina died during the war waged by Theodosius against Maximus. Of her character nothing derogatory is recorded with the exception of her heresy. It is hardly remarkable that, in an ecclesiastical dispute, she should be unable to cope with the man who, later, had the strength and the courage to close the door of the cathedral in the face of the great Theodosius, after his crime at Thessalonica.

Events so moved that, by the year 394, Theodosius had become the sole ruler of the Empire; but four months later he died at Milan, leaving the dominion of the East and the West to his sons Arcadius and Honorius respectively. Honorius was of a weakly constitution, and too young to take part in public matters. Flavius Stilicho, a Vandal, and the ablest man both in court and in camp that those times produced, defended the Empire in the attacks of the barbarians who poured over the Danube and over the Rhine.

Stilicho had married the beautiful and accomplished Serena, the favorite niece of Theodosius. Claudian, in a poem devoted to the praise of Serena, has portrayed her excellences of mind and person as being of the most attractive quality. To her devotion to her husband the modern historian pays this tribute: "The arts of calumny might have been successful, if the tender and vigilant Serena had not protected her husband against his domestic foes, while he vanquished in the field the enemies of the empire."

The daughter of Serena, whose name was Maria, was made the wife of Honorius when that emperor was in his fourteenth year. Claudian wrote an epithalamium and some fescennine verses for the occasion, after the ancient

manner; nothing else of this kind could ever have been quite so ridiculously conventional, for, on the authority of Zosimus, we learn that Maria died a virgin after she had been ten years a wife. The debility of her husband's constitution rendered the continence, which the ecclesiastic of that time so greatly admired, uncommonly easy. Honorius sat on the Roman throne through a period of twenty-eight years, with little more influence or effect upon the history of his time than would have been exerted if his place had been filled by a wooden image.

In the meantime, those commotions had taken place in the interior of Asia which were to result in the flooding and overthrowing of the Roman Empire by hordes of migrating barbarians. The most formidable of these were the Huns, a Mongol race which had roamed the steppes from time immemorial. The Huns were the more terrible because of their extreme ugliness. Their appearance was a fearful visitation for the women of the civilized nations which they overran. These hardy and vicious savages suddenly swarmed out from their own country, and, driving the Ostrogoths before them, with devastating persistence rolled, a human wave, to the westward. The Goths were between "the devil and the deep sea." But, while the Huns were an irresistible force, the Romans were not an immovable body. Steadily the Goths gained ground westward with the Huns surging after them. Rome was doomed. The effeminating arts of civilization prepared a prey for the necessities of virile barbarism. A brave ruler like Theodosius, who was not of the enervated Roman race, might stem the tide for a while; but the disintegration of the Empire was as inevitable as is that of a pile of lumber when caught in the flooding of a river.

In the year 402, Alaric the Goth for the first time broke into the Western empire. He carried his conquering arms

into Italy, spreading a pathway of devastation and misery wherever he went. In modern times, it is impossible to estimate the suffering which an invasion brought upon the women of that fated country. The old and those deficient in personal attractions were robbed and, as likely as not, murdered; the young and the beautiful were outraged and enslaved. All this wretchedness and more, the barbarians visited upon Rome; but Alaric's first exploit was ended at Pollentia by the brave generalship of Stilicho, though the good will of the barbarian was purchased by tribute. As soon as this danger was, for the time, averted, a new and not less fearful invasion spread over the Empire. Horde after horde of Vandals, Alani, Burgundians, and Alemannians crossed the frontiers in search of plunder and adventure. They, too, were held in check by the able minister; but gratitude for public service rendered is never so potential as is envy of the high position of the one giving it, and the sole defender of the Empire fell a victim to political machinations at the precise moment when the peril of Rome was greatest.

With Alaric pounding on the gates of the capital, the Romans, with the consent of Honorius, murdered the only man in the world who had proved himself the barbarian's match. Nor did they stop with the death of Stilicho; as Gibbon says: "Perhaps in the person of Serena, the Romans might have respected the niece of Theodosius, the aunt, nay, even the adoptive mother of the reigning emperor; but they abhorred the widow of Stilicho; and they listened with credulous passion to the tale of calumny which accused her of maintaining a secret and criminal correspondence with the Gothic invader. Actuated, or overawed, by the same popular frenzy, the senate, without requiring any evidence of her guilt, pronounced the sentence of her death. Serena was ignominiously strangled;

and the infatuated multitude were astonished to find that this cruel act of injustice did not immediately produce the retreat of the barbarians, and the deliverance of the city." One offence alleged against Serena was that she had taken a necklace from the statue of Vesta—it was then the fashion to clothe and adorn the statues, whether in the interest of modesty or ostentation we cannot say.

The description which the great student of ancient history just now quoted gives of the siege which Rome at that time endured is entirely in keeping with our subject. "That unfortunate city gradually experienced the distress of scarcity, and at length the horrid calamities of famine. The daily allowance of three pounds of bread was reduced to one-half, to one-third, to nothing. . . . The poorer citizens, who were unable to purchase the necessaries of life, solicited the precarious charity of the rich; and for a while the public misery was alleviated by the humanity of Læta, the widow of the emperor Gratian, who had fixed her residence at Rome, and consecrated to the use of the indigent the princely revenue which she annually received from the grateful successors of her husband. But these private and temporary donatives were insufficient to appease the hunger of a numerous people; and the progress of famine invaded the marble palaces of the senators themselves. The persons of both sexes, who had been educated in the enjoyment of ease and luxury, discovered how little is requisite to supply the demands of nature; and lavished their unavailing treasures of gold and silver, to obtain the coarse and scanty sustenance which they would formerly have rejected with disdain."

The outbreak of a pestilence soon added to the horrors of famine. Rome again suffered the loss of thousands of her citizens through disease. If the extent of this calamity was less than during the Great Plague, a century and

a half before, mourning was nevertheless almost universal. Gibbon says, "many thousands of the inhabitants of Rome expired in their houses or in the streets, for want of sustenance." But the almost unending funeral procession of the former period was now lacking, as the public sepulchres without the walls were within the circle of the invading horde.

There was no relief. When ambassadors pleaded with Alaric for the great multitude of the people against whom he was contending, his sole reply was: "The thicker the hay, the easier it is mowed." When he stipulated the ransom by which alone the city could be saved, and the ministers of the senate humbly inquired what he purposed to leave to them, he haughtily replied: "Your lives." The promise of five thousand pounds of gold, thirty thousand pounds of silver, four thousand robes of silk, three thousand pieces of fine scarlet cloth, and three thousand pounds of pepper suspended for a time the vengeance which centuries of oppression by Rome had accumulated in barbarian hearts.

The Roman courtiers, however, had neither the wisdom nor the honesty to keep faith with the enemy whom they could not resist and on whose good graces depended their safety. The patience of Alaric became exhausted. He threw off all restraint, determining to take the fate and also the resources of the Empire into his own hands. The year 410 saw the city, which had for a millennium been the proud mistress of the world, captured and at the mercy of the barbaric nations which for so many centuries had furnished her wealth and slaves.

The conqueror declared that he waged war with the Romans and not with the Apostles. Consequently, while he encouraged his soldiers to seize the opportunity to enrich themselves and enjoy the fruits of victory, he gave commands that the sanctity of the churches should be observed. The ecclesiastical writers recount instances of

seemingly remarkable protection vouchsafed to the holy virgins, who were at the mercy of a licentious soldiery. But there is every evidence that the customary fate of the conquered in those savage times was abundantly meted out. It is on record that many Christian women, in order to save themselves from what they dreaded still more, sought death in the waters of the Tiber. Others were more fortunate in being able to find protection in flight. "The most illustrious of these fugitives," says Gibbon, "was the noble and pious Proba, the widow of the præfect, Petronius. After the death of her husband, the most powerful subject of Rome, she had remained at the head of the Anician family, and successively supplied, from her private fortune, the expense of the consulships of her three sons. When the city was besieged and taken by the Goths, Proba supported, with Christian resignation, the loss of immense riches; embarked in a small vessel, from which she beheld, at sea, the flames of her burning palace, and fled with her daughter, Læta, and her granddaughter, the celebrated virgin, Demetrias, to the coast of Africa. The benevolent profusion with which the matron distributed the fruits or the price of her estates contributed to alleviate the misfortunes of exile and captivity. But the family of Proba herself was not exempt from the rapacious oppression of Count Heraclian, who basely sold, in matrimonial prostitution, the noblest maidens of Rome to the lust or avarice of Syrian merchants."

Alaric died shortly after his conquest, and the sceptre of the Gothic kingdom passed to the hand of Adolphus, his brother-in-law. The latter was a brave and able general, and seems to have possessed a nature not discreditable to the time in which he lived. He proposed—the proposal had all the effect of a command—a treaty of alliance with Honorius. It practically amounted to

annexation; but the Roman emperor was not in a position to refuse any proposition which the Goth might see fit to make. Nor could the Romans prevent Adolphus from strengthening his own interest, as well as consulting his passion, in taking to wife the half-sister of Honorius, Placidia, the daughter of Theodosius and Galla.

Placidia was just ripening into womanhood when Alaric first appeared before Rome. She was taken as a hostage by the Gothic conqueror, and, though reduced to the indignity of being a prisoner in a barbarian camp, was treated with great consideration. Her beauty and her mental gifts won the regard of Adolphus: and no sooner had he succeeded to the kingship, than he requested of Honorius her hand. Such an alliance was repugnant to the Romans, but, as in other matters, the request was only a polite form of command. Placidia herself does not appear to have been unwilling to accept the situation, and her nuptials were celebrated in splendid state. The exploits of his army in Italy had enabled Adolphus to present his bride with a magnificent wedding gift. The historian Olympiodorus recounts that fifty handsome boys were employed to carry this present. They came before her, carrying a bowl in each hand. One bowl was filled with pieces of gold, the other with precious gems. Adolphus always manifested a strong and tender affection for his wife; nor did he ever lose an opportunity to honor her birth, seating her above himself on state occasions.

This union, however, was destined to be short-lived. Adolphus was stricken down by the hand of an assassin; his enemy was seated upon his throne; and Placidia, being brutally and of purpose made one of a number of common captives, was compelled to run for twelve miles before the horse of the barbarian chieftain, the murderer of a husband whom she had sincerely loved. Possibly it was her

sufferings which aroused the people; however, her persecutor was himself assassinated a few days after his own murderous act; and Placidia was restored to her brother, her ransom being six hundred thousand measures of wheat.

Placidia would have been willing, in accordance with the Christian teaching of the time, to have lamented the loss of Adolphus in continual widowhood. But another marriage was arranged for her, without her consent: she was awarded as a prize to Constantius the general for his services to Honorius. The results of this marriage were the birth of Honoria and of Valentinian III., and, probably through the schemes of Placidia, the promotion of her husband to the title of Augustus. But it was not long before the princess again found herself a widow; and though mischievous tongues magnified the caresses of childish affection on the part of Honorius to signs of a fondness warmer than their kinship would warrant, a quarrel between these two caused Placidia to go with her children to Constantinople.

At the death of Honorius, Valentinian, though no more than six years of age, was invested with the purple. But his mother was empress; the policy of the Empire was directed by her; and for twenty-five years she maintained her power. Gibbon speaks slightingly of her ability; but it could not have been little, else how did she retain a rule which any chance military adventurer might be tempted to seize? The historian refers to Cassiodorus, who compares the regencies of Placidia and Amalasuntha, to the disadvantage of the former.

The life of the Roman empress had been filled with more adventures and changes of fortune than were wont to fall to the lot of woman, even in those troublous times, but her story is less strange and is certainly happier than that of her daughter, Honoria. There is in existence a

medal bearing the countenance of Honoria, and it is a fair face; it bears the inscription *Augusta*. The young princess was invested with this honor and rank in order that she might be above the aspirations of any subject. As early as her sixteenth year, however, she chafed against the isolation to which she was doomed. Denied legitimate love, she abandoned herself to an illicit relationship with one of the domestic officers of the palace, the fact of which was soon revealed by her pregnancy. She was exiled by her mother to Constantinople, where she spent several years in close restraint and great unhappiness. Attila the Hun was at that time the particular barbarian who was harassing the Empire; and suddenly he announced that he had received the betrothal of the princess Honoria, and that he claimed her as his bride. Then her astonished relatives learned that she really had been in correspondence with Attila, and had besought him to claim her in marriage. It is probable that a spirit of mischief actuated Honoria in this; for no educated woman could in reality desire to be joined in marriage with the Hun, unless it were from motives very different from love. The king had at first disdained her advances, and was willing to act upon them only when it suited the policy dictated by his ambition. But Placidia steadfastly refused to countenance her daughter's procedure; and Honoria, being first married to a man of mean extraction, in order that the question of her matrimonial disposal might never again be a source of trouble, was shut up in a close prison for the rest of her days. It is not unlikely that her misfortunes arose rather from her position than her character. That her life with Attila, had she attained her object, would have proved more desirable than perpetual imprisonment is difficult to believe. His respect for woman may be estimated from the fact that he was a polygamist, and also from the fact that he watched his soldiers amuse

themselves with the awful death agonies of two hundred maidens, whom they tore limb from limb with wild horses and crushed under the wheels of heavy wagons.

Placidia died in the year 450. She was buried at Ravenna; and, with some ambiguity of meaning, it is said that there her corpse, seated in a chair of cypress wood, was preserved for ages. Her son perished by the avenging hand of a senator whose wife he had perfidiously violated. He was the last emperor of the house of Theodosius; and his mother was the last woman, with a name in history, who was worthy of mention in the records of the perishing Western Empire.

With the death of Placidia, we arrive at the end of a cycle in the evolution of the human race. It was contemporaneous with the terminus of ancient Aryan civilization—it was during a climacteric in human history. Again the world was to revert to the rudeness necessarily accompanying the vigorous strength which characterizes the setting forth of a new race. The world began again—polished manners and social order gave place to strenuosity and individualism. The strong hand again became the one thing needful. Literature was silent, and art was forgotten. Of the glory of classic civilization there remained only a memory; and even this grew faint, for the struggle for existence became exacting. Nevertheless, from all that Rome had done and had been there remained an imperishable deposit. From the ruins of one civilization there is gathered the foundations for the succeeding. Rome left, among other contributions to absolute progress, the idea of nationality and a belief in the necessity of popular law. In these two respects, woman shared in the determined progress of the world. The Roman woman manifested the capacity of her sex to place a steady hand on the helm of the state; she wrested for herself some of those legal rights to which, by virtue of her humanity at least, she is indubitably entitled.

Chapter VIII

Women of the Frankish Church

VIII

WOMEN OF THE FRANKISH CHURCH

WE may now consider ourselves to have nearly passed the transition period between the Classic and the Middle Ages, and to have begun to enter that indefinite range of history known as Mediævalism—indefinite as to character rather than extent of period. A new world opens to our view; a world which we examine under the influence of the romanticist more than under that of the philosopher. In the age to which our researches have now brought us we find that the life of woman has wholly changed. Evolution has taken a new beginning. In place of the state as the symbol and the object of power and progress individualism has come to the front and asserted itself. There is now more play for personal initiation on the part of the multitude. The activity of the individual is more directly attributable to his personal motives and culminates more fully in his own desires. Consequently, though woman is still held down to an inferior level, and is hampered by unequal laws, she has more room in which to assert herself, and she plays a stronger part in historical events. Practically, though not theoretically, she is still given in marriage without her consent; but she is no longer regarded as a mere possession. Her surroundings also have wonderfully changed. In place of the porticoed villa with its marble floor and beautiful statuary, its highly decorated

atrium and sparkling fountains, she is now seen in what was the rudiment of the turreted castle with its rough hall and rush-strewn floor. She has lost the learning by which she was wont to delight her idle hours with classic poetry and Greek philosophy; if she can read at all, her accomplishment is a rare one, and the most powerful stimulus to her imagination is the song of illiterate bards who recite the heroic achievements of her race. In this she has reverted to literature in its embryonic condition. Her religion has gained morality, though emphatically more in theory than in practice, but it has distinctly lost in poetry. Elegance has disappeared from every phase of her life. When she rides abroad it is no longer in a splendidly equipped litter, but, in hardier fashion, upon horseback. While for her to lead men-at-arms is an extreme rarity, she is far likelier to attain ruling authority than she was under the refined civilization of older times. With the Franks, however, supreme rule by a woman, in any direct manner, was rendered impossible by the ancient Salic law which prescribed that "no portion of really Salic land (that is to say, in the full territorial ownership of the head of the family) should pass into the possession of women, but it should belong altogether to the virile sex."

To us the early Mediæval life seems more remote and less intelligible than that of the classic age. We are more at home in the villas of Rome than in the castles of Charlemagne. This is partly because the literature of the latter age has not presented such a satisfying picture as have the immortal productions of the former; but more largely because the genius of modern civilization has its counterpart in the social ideas of classic times, rather than in the individualistic motive of mediævalism.

The period covered by this chapter extends over four hundred years, from the end of the fifth century to the tenth.

In our selection of characters from the successive generations during that term, we shall have an eye to their utility as representing types of the feminine, even more than to their aptitude for illustrating any special development in civilized habits. Evolution proceeded slowly in those days, and, consequently, a century or two did not greatly change social habits.

Somewhere about the middle of the fifth century, a Frankish chief named Childéric was driven from his own people by the varying fortunes of war. He took refuge among the Thuringians, and rewarded their kindness by seducing Basina, the wife of their king. After his return, she left her husband and joined her lover, becoming his recognized wife. Childéric's guilt in this affair is somewhat mitigated by the spirit of Basina, who declared that she chose the Frank solely because she knew no man who was wiser, stronger or handsomer, surely a frank admission of natural sentiment. The offspring of this free union was Clovis, the founder of the kingdom of the Franks, and the means whereby it became Christian.

While still a youth, though established in the chieftainship by his valor in marauding expeditions, Clovis heard of the beauty and the desirable character of Clotilde, the niece of Gondebaud, King of the Burgundians. She had been brought up amidst the most barbarous scenes which those times could produce. Her father and her two brothers had been put to death by her uncle, who had also caused her mother Agrippina to be thrown into the Rhone, with a stone fastened to her neck, and drowned. Clotilde and her sister Chrona, he permitted to live. The latter had become a nun, while Clotilde, no less religious, was living at Geneva where, as it is said, she employed her whole time in works of piety and charity. Clovis sent to Gondebaud asking the hand of his niece; but it

appears that at first his suit was not favorably looked upon, for the Frank resorted to unusual measures whereby he gained his end and provided the material for an interesting story. It is told as follows by Frédégaire in his commentary on the history by Gregory of Tours: "As he was not allowed to see Clotilde, Clovis charged a certain Roman, named Aurelian, to use all his wit to come nigh her. Aurelian repaired alone to the spot, clothed in rags and with his wallet upon his back, like a mendicant. To ensure confidence in himself, he took with him the ring of Clovis. On his arrival at Geneva, Clotilde received him as a pilgrim charitably, and whilst she was washing his feet, Aurelian, bending toward her, said under his breath, 'Lady, I have great matters to announce to thee if thou deign to permit me secret revelation.' She consenting, replied, 'Say on.' 'Clovis, King of the Franks,' said he, 'hath sent me to thee: if it be the will of God, he would fain raise thee to his high rank by marriage; and that thou mayest be certified thereof, he sendeth thee this ring.' She accepted this ring with great joy, and said to Aurelian, 'Take for recompense of thy pains these hundred sous in gold and this ring of mine. Return promptly to thy lord; if he would fain unite me to him in marriage, let him send without delay messengers to demand me of my uncle Gondebaud, and let the messengers who shall come take me away in haste, so soon as they shall have obtained permission; if they haste not, I fear lest a certain sage, one Aridius, may return from Constantinople; and if he arrive beforehand, all this matter will by his counsel come to naught.'"

Aurelian returned and told Clovis all that had passed and the instructions he had received from Clotilde. "Clovis, pleased with his success and with Clotilde's notion, at once sent a deputation to Gondebaud to demand his niece

in marriage. Gondebaud, not daring to refuse, and flattered at the idea of making a friend of Clovis, promised to give her to him. Then the deputation, having offered the denier and the sou, according to the custom of the Franks, espoused Clotilde in the name of Clovis, and demanded that she be given up to be married. Without any delay, the council was assembled at Châlons, and preparations were made for the nuptials. The Franks, having arrived with all speed, received her from the hands of Gondebaud, put her into a covered carriage and escorted her to Clovis, together with much treasure. She, however, having already learned that Aridius was on his way back, said to the Frankish lords, 'If ye would take me into the presence of your lord, let me descend from this carriage, mount me on horseback, and get you hence as fast as you may; for never in this carriage shall I reach the presence of your lord.'

"Aridius, in fact, returned very speedily from Marseilles; and Gondebaud, on seeing him, said, 'Thou knowest that we have made friends with the Franks, and that I have given my niece to Clovis to wife.' 'This,' answered Aridius, 'is no bond of friendship, but the beginning of perpetual strife; thou shouldst have remembered, my lord, that thou didst slay Clotilde's father, that thou didst drown her mother, and that thou didst cut off her brothers' heads and cast their bodies into a well. If Clotilde become powerful, she will avenge the wrongs of her relatives. Send thou forthwith a troop in chase, and have her brought back to thee. It will be easier for thee to bear the wrath of one person than to be perpetually at strife, thyself and thine, with all the Franks.' And Gondebaud did send forthwith a troop in chase to fetch back Clotilde with the carriage and all the treasure; but she, on approaching Villers (where Clovis was waiting for her),

in the territory of Troyes, and before passing the Burgundian frontier, urged them who escorted her to disperse right and left over a space of twelve leagues in the country whence she was departing, to plunder and burn; and that having been done with the permission of Clovis, she cried aloud, 'I thank thee, God omnipotent, for that I see the commencement of vengeance for my parents and my brethren!'"

The kingdom to which Clovis welcomed his queen was not large. It comprised no more than the island of the Batavians, and the dioceses of Tournay and Arras. Nevertheless, this marriage was of exceeding importance in the history of Europe, for by virtue of his qualities Clovis was destined to go far in conquest, and to establish the beginning of a great nation; and the question of his conversion, whether to Arianism or to Catholicism, was fairly certain to be answered by his matrimonial alliance. The time had come when political wisdom provided the most effective argument against paganism.

It was not at once, however, that Clotilde was able to bring about the conversion of her husband. The most she could accomplish was to gain his consent, after the birth of their first son, to the baptism of the latter. The child dying a few days afterward, serious misgivings arose in the king's mind as to whether he had not been ill advised in permitting the Christian rite. But Clotilde's second son also was baptized, and fell sick. Said Clovis: "It cannot be otherwise with him than with his brother; baptized in the name of your Christ, he is going to die." The child lived, and thereby Clotilde was placed to better advantage in attacking her husband's mind with her Christian arguments. He was brought to the point of decision when, in his battle at Tolbiac against the Alemannians, the day seeming about to be lost, Aurelian cried: "My

lord king, believe only on the Lord of heaven, whom the queen, my mistress, preacheth!" Clovis exclaimed: "Christ Jesus, Thou whom my queen Clotilde calleth the Son of the Living God, I have invoked my own gods, and they have withdrawn from me; I believe that they have no power, since they aid not those who call upon them. Thee, very God and Lord, I invoke; if Thou give me victory over these foes; if I find in Thee the power the people proclaim of Thee, I will believe on Thee, and will be baptized in Thy name." The fortune of battle immediately turned in favor of the Franks.

On his return home, to make sure that her husband would fulfil his vow while his gratitude was warm, Clotilde sent for Saint Remi, the holy Bishop of Rheims, to perfect her own instructions and receive him into the Church. Clovis was baptized, as were also the majority of his subjects. To what extent the doctrines of Christianity had taken possession of his mind may be gathered from the anecdote which recounts how, after hearing from the bishop's lips the story of the sufferings of Christ, he shouted: "Had I been present at the head of my valiant Franks, I would have revenged his injuries!" As Gibbon says: "The savage conqueror of Gaul was incapable of examining the proofs of a religion which depended upon the laborious investigation of historic evidence and speculative theology. He was still more incapable of feeling the mild influence of the gospel, which persuades and purifies the heart of a genuine convert. His ambitious reign was a perpetual violation of moral and Christian duties: his hands were stained with blood in peace as well as in war." He took part in a synod of the Gallican Church, and immediately murdered in cold blood all the princes of the Merovingian race. Into what a pit the Christianity of those times had fallen may be understood when we find Gregory

of Tours, after calmly reciting the murders of Clovis, concluding with these words: "For God thus daily prostrated his enemies under his hands, and enlarged his kingdom, because he walked before him with an upright heart, and did that which was pleasing in his sight." Clovis was the only strictly orthodox sovereign of that day—a day when orthodoxy was permitted to cover a multitude of sins.

After making himself sole monarch of the Frankish race, Clovis died in the year 511, and was buried in the church which had been erected by Clotilde. The queen survived her husband many years, but did not exercise any noticeable influence. She could not even save her two little grandsons from the ambitious cruelty of her sons—Clotaire and Childebert. These sent a message to Clotilde saying: "Send the children to us, that we may place them on the throne." Having sent them, there soon came to her another messenger, bearing a sword and a pair of shears. Unshorn locks were essential as a mark of the kingly race among the Franks; the messenger said therefore: "Most glorious queen, thy sons, our masters, desire to know thy will touching these children; wilt thou that they live with shorn hair or that they be put to death?" Clotilde, in her astonishment and despair, answered: "If they be not set upon the throne, I would rather know that they were dead than shorn." The messenger hastened back to the two kings and, with fatal and wilful inaccuracy, said: "Finish ye your work, for the queen favoring your plans, willeth that ye accomplish them." Forthwith the two children were murdered in the most cold-blooded fashion. The tale is rendered the more shocking by the addition of the fact that Guntheuque, the mother of the lads, had become the wife of that uncle who killed them.

The Merovingians allowed themselves as much license in love as they did freedom from restraint in regard to the

sterner passions. Nominal Christians though they were, they felt no compunction of conscience as to polygamy, when the vagaries of their fancy could be satisfied only by its practice. Gregory of Tours records how: "King Clotaire I. had to wife Ingonde, and her only did he love, when she made to him the following request: 'My lord,' said she, 'hath made of his handmaid what seemeth to him good; and now, to crown his favors, let my lord deign to hear what his handmaid demandeth. I pray you be graciously pleased to find for my sister Arégonde, your slave, a man both capable and rich, so that I be rather exalted than abased thereby, and be enabled to serve you still more faithfully.' At these words, Clotaire, who was but too voluptuously disposed by nature, conceived a fancy for Arégonde, betook himself to the country house where she dwelt, and united her to him in marriage. When the union had taken place, he returned to Ingonde, and said to her, 'I have labored to procure for thee the favor thou didst so sweetly demand, and, on looking for a man of wealth and capability worthy to be united to thy sister, I could find none better than myself: know, therefore, that I have taken her to wife, and I trow that it will not displease thee.' 'What seemeth good in my master's eyes, that let him,' replied Ingonde; 'only let thy servant abide still in the king's grace.'"

From the above, it is noticeable that a servile manner of speech to their husbands was customary to the Frankish women of that time. It is possible that it was little more than an affectation. Doubtless the women of character and strength then, as ever, were not without means of holding their own. Chilpéric, the King of Soissons, who was a son of Clotaire, added to the not brief list of his wives—we may give him the benefit of the doubt as to whether they were contemporaneous—Galsuinthe, daughter of the

King of Spain. Her attractiveness consisted in no small measure of the wealth she brought him. But he became enamored of Frédégonde. Galsuinthe could not brook this, and she offered to willingly relinquish her dowry if he would send her back to her father. Chilpéric adopted a solution of the difficulty that was more to his mind. The queen was found dead in her bed. She had been strangled by a slave. Chilpéric mourned for a season which was more remarkable for its brevity than his sorrow was marked by its intensity, and then took Frédégonde for his wife. This queen exerted an influence upon the affairs of her time, both political and ecclesiastical. In her life and character was fully illustrated that strong mixture of viciousness and affected piety which occasions such a sad commentary on the Christianity of her time. She was the daughter of peasants, and owed her rise solely to her beauty and her mental gifts. Her numerous murders included her stepson, a king, and the Archbishop of Rouen. How much regard she entertained for her own personal chastity may be judged from the fact that she took a public oath, with three bishops and four hundred nobles as her vouchers, that her son was the true offspring of her husband, Chilpéric. Whether the value of this great mass of testimony consisted in a personal denial of responsibility on the part of all the men whose position and character might be prejudicial to Chilpéric's paternity is not made clear. And yet, despite all this, the following pious act is recorded to her: her child was ill; "he was a little brother, when his elder brother, Chlodebert, was attacked with the same symptoms. His mother, Frédégonde, seeing him in danger of death, and touched by tardy repentance, said to the king, 'Long hath divine mercy borne with our misdeeds; it hath warned us by fevers and other maladies, and we have not mended our

ways, and now we are losing our sons; now the tears of the poor, the lamentations of widows, and the sighs of orphans are causing them to perish, and leaving us no hope of laying by for anyone. We heap up riches and know not for whom. Our treasures, all laden with plunder and curses, are like to remain without possessors. Our cellars are they not bursting with wine, and our granaries with corn? Our coffers were they not full to the brim with gold and silver and precious stones and necklaces and other imperial ornaments? And yet that which was our most beautiful possession we are losing! Come then, if thou wilt, and let us burn all these wicked lists!' Having thus spoken, and beating her breast, the queen had brought to her the rolls, which Mark had consigned to her of each of the cities that belonged to her, and cast them into the fire. Then, turning again to the king, 'What!' she cried, 'dost thou hesitate? Do thou even as I; if we lose our dear children, at least we escape everlasting punishment!'" It may be taken for granted that Frédégonde's "works meet for repentance" on this occasion have not suffered in the recital by Gregory of Tours. She may have exhorted her husband to acts of mercy; nevertheless she planned and saw executed the assassination of Chilpéric, being fearful lest he discover the guilty connection which had sprung up between herself and an officer of her household. By this act, she became the sovereign guardian of her infant, and held this potential position during the last thirteen years of her life. Guizot thus summarizes her character: "She was a true type of the strong-willed, artful, and perverse woman in barbarous times; she started low down in the scale and rose very high without a corresponding elevation of soul; she was audacious and perfidious, as perfect in deception as in effrontery, proceeding to atrocities either from cool

calculation or a spirit of revenge, abandoned to all kinds of passion, and, for gratification of them, shrinking from no sort of crime. However, she died quietly at Paris in 597 or 598, powerful and dreaded, and leaving on the throne of Neustria her son, Clotaire II., who, fifteen years later, was to become sole king of all the Frankish dominions."

Contemporaneous with Frédégonde, and exerting a stronger and indeed more salutary influence upon her age, though scarcely superior in her moral character, was Brunehaut, Queen of the Franks of Austrasia. She was a younger sister of Galsuinthe, by the murder of whom the way was opened to Chilpéric's bed and throne for Frédégonde. The King of Austrasia was Sigebert, brother of Chilpéric. Among those fierce Merovingians kinship of the closest degree had no deterring influence on their passions. In a war between these two brothers, Sigebert was assassinated in his tent by the emissaries of Frédégonde. Brunehaut fell into the latter's power, and only the fact that she managed to make her way into the Cathedral of Paris, and thus claim right of asylum, saved her life. Thence she was sent to Rouen, where she met and married a son of Chilpéric by a former wife. This so enraged Frédégonde that she persecuted her stepson until, in despair, he prevailed on a faithful servant to take his life. In the meantime, the Austrasians, who had the custody of Brunehaut's infant son, demanded their queen from Chilpéric; she was surrendered to them, and was instated as queen-guardian of her son.

Brunehaut was in every sense a born ruler. A princess by birth, she also possessed a mind that was capable of formulating plans which united her people with herself in the enjoyment of the fruits of success as well as in the labor of accomplishment. Faults she had in abundance. As callous in regard to bloodshed and as loose in her morals

as were the barbarians of her time, she was not without conscience as to the opportunities of her position, and she labored in many ways for the public good. Brunehaut came from Spain, where the Visigoths retained much of the Roman civilization. She endeavored to introduce some of these advantages into Austrasia, which was peopled by the least cultivated of the Franks; but, though forcing her reforms by sheer strength of will and intellect, the result was her expulsion from the land. The history of her rule is thus epitomized by Guizot: "She clung stoutly to the efficacious exercise of the royal authority; she took a practical interest in the public works, highways, bridges, monuments, and the progress of material civilization; the Roman roads in a short time received and for a long while kept in Austrasia the name of *Brunehaut's Causeways;* there used to be shown, in a forest near Bourges, Brunehaut's castle, Brunehaut's tower at Etampes, Brunehaut's stone near Tournay, and Brunehaut's fort near Cahors. In the royal domains, and wheresoever she went, she showed abundant charity to the poor, and many ages after her death the people of those districts still spoke of *Brunehaut's Alms.* She liked and protected men of letters, rare and mediocre indeed at that time, but the only beings, such as they were, with the notion of seeking and giving any kind of intellectual enjoyment; and they in turn took pleasure in celebrating her name and her deserts. The most renowned of all during that age, Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers, dedicated nearly all his little poems to two queens: one, Brunehaut, plunging amidst all the struggles and pleasures of the world; the other, Saint Radegonde, sometime wife of Clotaire I, who had fled in all haste from a throne to bury herself at Poitiers, in a convent she had founded there. To compensate, Brunehaut was detested by the majority of the Austrasian chiefs, those *Leudes,*

land owners and warriors, whose sturdy and turbulent independence she was continually fighting against. She supported against them, with indomitable courage, the royal officers, the servants of the palace, her agents, and frequently her favorites."

Brunehaut maintained her power under the reigns of her son and her grandson in Austrasia, the capital of which was Metz. In 599, however, she was expelled from this kingdom, and went to that of Burgundy, where her other grandson, Théodoric II., reigned, having his capital at Orléans. In a letter written to Théodoric by Gregory the Great, the latter says: "And this in you among other things is enough to call for praise and admiration, that in such things as you know that our daughter, your most excellent grandmother, desires for the love of God, in these you make haste most earnestly to lend your aid, so that thereby you may reign both happily here, and in a future life with the angels." It is evident from this that in Burgundy the veteran queen was not denied the opportunity to exercise that executive talent of which the Austrasians had wearied. If the accounts given by Frankish historians may be relied upon, Brunehaut's influence upon her grandson was not in all respects calculated to fit him for a life among the angels. They accuse her of having encouraged him in licentious living, in order that her own power might not be undermined by the introduction into his court of a lawful queen.

There are several letters extant which were written to her by Pope Gregory. They all, in that polite manner in which Church dignitaries treat worldly potentates, speak of her virtuous acts and ignore all mention of her frailties. Brunehaut would be an exceedingly estimable woman if nothing more of her were known than what is to be gathered from these epistles. Gregory was a severe moralist,

but he allowed his condemnation of many faults to be silenced by his gratitude for the piety of the queen in erecting "the Church of Saint Martin in the suburbs of Augustodunum (Autun), and a monastery for handmaidens of God, and also a hospital in the same city." There is also a letter to Thalassia, the first abbess of this convent, ordaining that the property donated shall never be alienated from her and her successors; also, that "on the death of an abbess of the aforementioned monastery, no other shall be ordained by means of any kind of craftiness or secret scheming, but that such a one as the king of the same province, with the consent of the nuns, shall have chosen in the fear of God, and provided for the ordination of." This also is evidence regarding the interior politics of the nunneries of that time.

Brunehaut lived a stormy life. Gentleness and modesty, the qualities most esteemed in feminine character, were the least noticeable in her nature; they would not have been consonant with either her ambitions or her methods. She was ever striving with the chieftains of her realm, endeavoring, with no little success, to force their independence into submission to regal authority. With the clerics, also, she had her quarrels. Saint Didier, Bishop of Vienne, was at her instigation brutally murdered. Saint Columba, even, was visited with her displeasure because he refused to connive at her faults with the award of his blessing. In 614, after thirty-nine years of the most strenuous political life and the most extreme vicissitudes of personal fortune that ever fell to the lot of any queen, she perished most miserably at the hands of Clotaire II., the son of her old enemy, Frédégonde. He caused the venerable queen, now eighty years of age, to be paraded before the army on the back of a camel; and then, by his order, she was bound by the hair, one hand, and one

foot, to the tail of an unbroken steed by which she was kicked and dashed to pieces. Thus lived, and thus died a "Christian" queen who had received high encomiums from one of the greatest bishops of history.

It must not be supposed, however, that feminine modesty, faithful love, and the gentleness which is ever venerated in womankind, were entirely unknown to that rough and licentious age. What could be more pleasing than the romantic story of Theodelinda, Queen of the Lombards? In the year 584, Authari succeeded to that kingdom. He asked in marriage the beautiful and pious daughter of Garibald, King of the Bavarians. In order that he might ascertain whether the attractions of this damsel were in reality equal to their reputation, and also that he might hasten matters in case he should be satisfied on this point, Authari impersonated his own ambassador and visited the court of Garibald in this guise. He there stated that he was the trusted friend of the Lombard king, and that Authari had charged him to bring back a minute report of the charm of his expected bride. Theodelinda submitted to the inspection; and the supposed ambassador, being at once enamored of her grace and beauty, hailed her as Queen of the Lombards, and requested that, according to the custom of his people, she present a cup of wine to him, her first subject. As she did this, he slyly touched her hand and then his own lips. This familiarity astonished the maiden, but, advised by her nurse, she said nothing, and Authari, before leaving the court, succeeded in gaining her affections. As he left to return home, he revealed his rank to her by saying, as he drove his huge battle-ax into the trunk of a tree, "Thus strikes the king of the Langobardi." After his departure, influenced by the Franks, Garibald withdrew his consent to his daughter's marriage; whereupon Theodelinda took the matter into her

own hands and fled across the Alps to her lover and was married to him at Verona. Although she was early left a widow, she had so completely gained the love and the confidence of the Lombards, that they intrusted her with the privilege of raising to the throne whomsoever she might favor with her hand in marriage. Her choice fell upon a handsome Thuringian named Agilulf. He knew not of his fortune until it was announced to him by the queen herself in this fashion: one day, as he bent to kiss her hand in faithful homage, she blushingly said, "You have the right to kiss my cheek, for you are my king!" So great was Theodelinda's influence over her people that at her request the whole nation simultaneously became Christian; and in view of that event, it is no wonder that she was on the most friendly terms with Pope Gregory the Great, whose letters to her may still be read. Under her happy reign, the kingdom of Lombardy was strengthened, and its constitution established. Agilulf died, and his son and successor, Adelwald, rendering himself obnoxious, was murdered by some of his subjects; but to make amends to her for this act, the Lombards placed the husband of her daughter Gerberga on the throne. Boccaccio, by making Theodelinda the subject of one of his amorous tales, has taken an unwarranted and reprehensible liberty with a good queen of whom her age was justly proud.

It is to these times, also, that the pathetic story of Saint Geneviève belongs. She was the wife of Count Siegfried of Andernach. He, setting out against the Moors who were then invading the land, intrusted her to the care of Golo, his principal servant. This man, having failed in his repeated attempts on her conjugal faithfulness, accused her of the fault which he would fain have persuaded her to commit, and procured her condemnation to death. Her executioners being merciful, spared her life

by having her conveyed far into the recesses of a forest. There she, with her little daughter, lived for several years in absolute solitude. They were sheltered by a cave; and a doe, whose tameness was regarded as a miraculous providence, supplied them with milk. It was no less regarded as a divine interposition which eventually led Siegfried to the grotto while following the chase; her innocence being proved, she was happily reinstated as his wife, and has ever since been honored as a saint, which doubtless she was.

Christianity, during the latter half of the first millennium, could show triumphs of sanctification in personal character; it had its heroes of morality, but it must be confessed that the conversion of the barbaric nations was not accompanied with a very signal improvement in their morals. Milman says: "It is difficult to conceive a more dark and odious state of society than that of France under her Merovingian kings, the descendants of Clovis, as described by Gregory of Tours. In the conflict or coalition of barbarism with Roman Christianity, barbarism has introduced into Christianity all its ferocity, with none of its generosity or magnanimity; its energy shows itself in atrocity of cruelty and even of sensuality. Christianity has given to barbarism hardly more than its superstition and its hatred of heretics and unbelievers. Throughout, assassinations, parricides, and fratricides intermingle with adulteries and rapes. . . .

"As to the intercourse of the sexes, wars of conquest where the females are at the mercy of the victors, especially if female virtue is not in much respect, would severely try the more rigid morals of the conqueror. The strength of the Teutonic character, when it had once burst the bounds of habitual or traditional restraint, might seem to disdain easy and effeminate vice, and to seek a kind of wild zest in the indulgence of lust, by mingling it with all other

violent passions, rapacity, and inhumanity. Marriage was a bond contracted and broken on the lightest occasion. Some of the Merovingian kings took as many wives, either together or in succession, as suited either their passions or their politics. Christianity hardly interferes even to interdict incest." Clotaire and Charibert each married two sisters. The latter was sternly rebuked by Saint Germanus, but (so the historian informs us) as the king already had many wives, he bore the rebuke with extreme patience. There were laws against these irregularities; but, strict as they were in their terms, they were completely nullified by failure of execution. These laws, also, are models of the inequality which existed between the sexes. When punishment for adultery is prescribed, it is always understood that it refers solely to the wife. The man was burdened by no legal responsibility in this matter. Free women were not permitted to marry slaves; to do so reduced them to a position of servitude. This did not apply to men, excepting such as were too poor to compound the felony with the abducted slave's owner. The kings were free in this matter.

Under the Carlovingian dynasty, manners were somewhat less ferocious than those exhibited by the Merovingian kings; but it was rather the result of the former being more confident of its security than any evidence of real improvement in morals. Earnest champion of the Church as was Charlemagne, and much as he honored religion, the records of his own private life and those of his family are examples of wholesale libidinosity such as is rarely equalled in history.

Five women were united in marriage to the great emperor. The first was Désirée, the daughter of the Lombard king, whom Pope Stephen so bitterly opposed. This union, however, was short lived; during one year only did

Désirée hold the wandering affections of the sturdy monarch. He then took Hildegarde, a Swabian princess; but in the same indifferent manner he dissolved this connection, being instigated thereto by the allegations of a servant named Taland, who was enraged at the contempt with which the queen received his criminal advances. Charlemagne did not trouble himself to look into the matter; like Cæsar, he held that his wife should be above suspicion. There is a pleasing story in regard to Hildegarde who, after her divorce, went to Rome and devoted herself to a religious life. By her charitable deeds and acts of piety she gained a great and well deserved name for sanctity. It is said that one day she met Taland, who was reduced to the life of a blind mendicant. By the power of her holiness, she restored his sight, and he, filled with remorse, confessed his crime and brought about a reconciliation between Hildegarde and the king. No less naïve is the legend related of one of Charlemagne's daughters. His children included several girls, all beautiful; but for political reasons their father denied them the privilege of marriage. He considered that if they were united to the great nobles of the land, it would mean a division and consequent weakening of the empire. But love laughed at politics. "His secretary, young Eginhart, became deeply enamored of his daughter Emma, and the youthful lovers, fearing his anger should he discover their affection, met only at night. It happened that one night, while Eginhart was in the princess's apartment, a fall of snow took place. To return across the palace court must lead to the inevitable discovery by the traces of his footsteps. The moment called for resolution; woman's wit came to the assistance of the perplexed lover, and the faithful and prudent Emma, taking her lover on her back, bore him across the court. The emperor, who chanced to

be gazing from his window, beheld this strange sight by the clear moonlight, and the next morning sent for the young couple, who stood before him in the expectation of being sentenced to death, when the generous father bestowed upon Eginhart his daughter's hand, and the Odinwald in fief. The tomb of Emma and Eginhart is still to be seen at Erbach." Another daughter, Bertha, called after her grandmother—the mother of Charlemagne, carried on a similar intrigue with Engelbert; and, though not fortunate enough to receive her father's sanction to marriage, with a gift of land, she became the mother of Nithart, who was a famous historian of his time. Charlemagne's own character enabled him to understand, and his justice prompted him to condone those instincts which his policy would not allow to be satisfied in a lawful and conventional manner.

Charlemagne died in 813. From that time until the end of the tenth century there were no women who can, by the greatest elasticity of which the term is susceptible, be called Christian, and who, at the same time were of any note in history. The gloom of the dark ages had not begun to lift. There was nothing to stimulate the woman of ordinary birth to the exercise of any powers save the most inferior. The broadening influence of literature was unknown. Charlemagne encouraged study among his courtiers; but he could not revive the smouldering embers. During the succeeding centuries, Greek lore came to be forgotten in the Western world. The manners, even among the noblest dames, were inconceivably rude. Every woman, not excepting the daughters of the emperor, worked with her hands in the common affairs of the household. What the morals of the time were, we have already seen. Convents sprang up everywhere, sheltering a great number of women, of both high and low degree.

They were refuges from the barbarities which accompanied warfare, and, to a lesser degree, safeguards against the temptation of the world, the flesh and the devil. The former fanatical enthusiasm for celibacy had greatly subsided; bishops and priests not infrequently were married, and even the nunneries gave occasion for lively stories which became traditional. It was an age when two sisters, Marozia and Theodora, both prostitutes, could decide the succession to the papal tiara. The former secured it for her bastard son, and also for her grandson, the infamous John XII., during whose pontificate, as Gibbon puts it, "the Lateran palace was turned in a school for prostitution, and his rapes of virgins and widows deterred the female pilgrims from visiting the tomb of St. Peter, lest, in the devout act, they should be violated by his successor." It was an age fitted in all ways to produce such a story as that of Pope Joan, which, though it was probably not founded on fact, is a worthy illustration of the moral condition of the rulers of the Church in that time.

We have seen that, save for the story of Hildegarde, the women of Charlemagne's family did not present examples of Christian piety or devotion, but it may be in place here to mention that Saint Rosalie, the patron saint of Palermo, was of a family said to have descended from that of Charlemagne. Saint Rosalie, becoming filled with a spirit of devotion, retired to a grotto on Mount Pelegrino, where in solitude she passed her time in prayer and penitence. Miraculous power was ascribed by the Sicilians to this saint, and of her is told the legend that, surreptitiously conveying bread concealed in her apron to feed the hungry, without her father's consent, she was discovered by him and requested to open her apron, when it was found that the bread had been changed into magnificent roses.

Part Second

Women of the Eastern Empire

Chapter IX

The Empress Eudoxia

IX

THE EMPRESS EUDOXIA

FROM the story of Christian Womanhood in Old Rome on the Tiber we pass naturally to the story of Christian Womanhood in that New Rome on the Bosporus, where Constantine the Great had established an imperial city which was destined to be the centre of the religious and political life of the civilized peoples of the East for over a thousand years, and to keep alive during the Dark Ages the torch of civilization.

The victories of the Cæsars in the extensive domain Hellenized by Alexander the Great had been surpassed only by the victories of the Christ, and in Constantinople the authority of Church and State blended in one inseparable union and determined the destinies of millions of men and women in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

As Greek culture was ever an important factor in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the story of the Christian women of the East is but a continuation of the story of Greek women. Hence, it is our task to consider how Hellenized womanhood was affected by that new principle which had entered into the world.

Christianity, with its emphasis on the affections, naturally appealed to women, who, says Aristotle, "are creatures of passion, as opposed to men, who are capable of living by reason." And from the days of Mary, the

Mother of Jesus, the women of antiquity accepted in large numbers the new teaching. They found that their lives were uplifted by it, their activities enlarged, their influence among men strengthened.

The status of woman among Oriental peoples was consequently considerably changed. The recognition, so slowly won, that women had immortal souls equalized them with the other sex, and with the permeation of Christianity into the life of paganism began the real emancipation of the female sex. Functions beyond those of housewifery and maternity were conceded to woman. Chrysostom, in a letter to a Roman lady, after speaking of the division of duties assigned by nature to men and women, says that the Christian life had extended woman's sphere beyond the duties of the home, and had given her an important part to perform in the work and struggles of the Church for the elevation of mankind. Her chief function, in his opinion, was that of consoler and ministering angel. Thus woman was acknowledged to have a mission—a view that has prevailed through all the Christian ages. In the pursuit of this idea, many of the loveliest and most highly endowed women of ancient times devoted themselves to the relief of sickness and suffering and extended the influence of the Church by this exhibition of the spirit of humanity.

Christianity was gradually transforming the spirit of the ancient world. But these earlier centuries of the Christian era were a season of twilight during which light and darkness mingled. Paganism and Christianity were waging a silent but determined warfare, and the latter, by absorbing the best that was in the former, left it but a hollow shell, the connotation of worldliness and unbelief. The ethical philosophy of the Greeks and the moral teachings of the Stoics and the Epicureans had found their logical end

in the philosophical doctrines of Christianity and had prepared the way for the acceptance of the latter. Christianity continued the idea of conformity to the divine government of the world taught by the Stoics, and the insistence on friendship and brotherly love emphasized by the Epicureans, and had given life to these doctrines by the presentation of a divine example. This evolution of the highest ethical ideas of the ancients in the nobler spirit of Christianity had its logical outcome in the prevailing institutions of the Christian world. Stoicism developed into the asceticism that appealed so strongly to many consecrated men and women, and Christian Epicureanism showed itself in the many brotherhoods and sisterhoods which labored for the betterment of humanity in the care of the sick and the unfortunate.

One of the effects of the Stoical idea combined with the new conception of the mission of woman was the prevalence of celibacy. Many women chose to devote their time to good works rather than to the cares of family life. Furthermore, "the horror of unchastity—the desecration of the body, the temple of the soul—which had taken possession of the age with a sort of morbid excess led to vows of perpetual virginity."

This emphasis on the unmarried life was unfortunate for the race, as it conduced to degeneracy and depopulation; but it produced many examples of consecrated and devoted women, who have merited the homage bestowed on them by later ages.

As regards the relation of the sexes, the greatest contrast lay in the Christian conception of a purified spiritual love, as compared with the carnal and sensual love of the pagan peoples. This is illustrated by the popularity of the celebrated legend of Cyprian and Justina, which was later versified by the Empress Eudoxia.

Justina was a young and beautiful maiden of Corinth, who was passionately loved by a handsome pagan youth, Aglaides. Every effort to win the maiden's affections, which were given to Christ, proving of no avail, Aglaides determined to enlist in his cause the powers of darkness. To this end he engaged the services of a powerful magician, Cyprian by name, who was versed in all the magic lore of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians. The wizard's art devised every form of temptation, but the demons who were called up to accomplish the maiden's ruin fled at the sign of the Cross which she made; and Justina emerged from the ordeal pure and spotless, untainted by all the arts of the Evil One. Cyprian, overcome by the beauty and innocence and unbounded faith of the maiden, was himself inspired with the purest and most intense love for Justina, and, renouncing all his arts, was converted to Christianity. The devoted pair suffered martyrdom in the persecutions of Diocletian.

Such Christian ideals, opposing all that was basest in paganism, naturally developed a new and an exceedingly high type of womanhood. Of the women of the provinces we know almost nothing, for the records of the Eastern Empire centre about the capital city. We may be sure, however, that throughout the Orient Christian womanhood exhibited its characteristic traits of piety and unselfishness. In Constantinople, though an intensely religious city, paganism for centuries continued to exert a marked influence, and the type of woman there varied in accordance with the proportions of the two ingredients—Christianity and paganism—in the mental and spiritual aggregate of the individual woman. Some, to avoid the vanities and temptations of the world, lived lives of retirement in secluded monasteries; others, often of prominent social position, partook not of the gay life of the city, but gave

themselves up to good works, ministering to the sick, providing for the poor, uplifting the fallen; while others, chiefly in the court circles, knew how to combine with their devotion to all the vanities and frivolities of high life a strict attention to the external duties of Christianity. The religious sisters of the day were an important factor in the society of Constantinople, and the exercise of their spiritual duties often brought them before the public in a manner inconsistent with the prevailing ideas of female retirement. A popular priest or bishop became the target of admiration on the part of enthusiastic women, who would gather about him and espouse his cause in a way that was often more embarrassing than helpful. As Jerome in Old Rome, so Chrysostom in New Rome was the centre of such a spiritual circle.

These various types of Christian womanhood present themselves in the reign of Arcadius, the first independent emperor of the Eastern Empire so called, and we are indebted to the sermons of the patriarch Chrysostom for many glimpses into their lives. Far more than in Old Rome the influence of women made itself felt in the government at Constantinople, and under almost every dynasty and throughout the centuries of its existence we find remarkable ladies of the imperial house playing a prominent part in politics as well as in religion.

The keynote of this new departure was struck by Eudoxia, empress of Arcadius, and the influence of her personality and her example upon her successors was marked. Hence, her career and that of the women of her time constitute the initial stage in the prominence of Christian women of the East.

Owing to the intellectual weakness of Arcadius, who inherited the eastern half of the Empire upon the death of Theodosius the Great in 395, the administration really

fell into the hands of his minister, Rufinus, a vicious and avaricious man. Having the entire control of the army and an unbounded influence over the emperor, Rufinus cherished the hope that he might himself become a wearer of the purple as the colleague of Arcadius. To facilitate this end he fostered the scheme of uniting Arcadius in marriage to his only daughter; once the emperor's father-in-law, it would be but a step further to become a sharer of the purple.

While Rufinus, in secret with his confidants, nurtured this idea, the wily head of the opposite party of the court, getting an inkling of it, set everything in motion to turn the eyes of the inexperienced youth toward another maiden. The eunuch Eutropius, the grand chamberlain of the palace, a bold old man with Oriental craftiness, determined that to himself, and not to Rufinus, should the emperor be bound. Hence, while the old warrior was on a journey to Corinth avenging a private injury, Eutropius fixed the attention of the emperor upon Eudoxia, a maiden of singular beauty, the daughter of Bauto, a distinguished Frankish general, and reared since her father's death by the family of the sons of Promotus, an ancient Roman patrician. Eudoxia was at that time at the dawn of perfect womanhood. Her education had been received under the auspices of her rich and noble patrons, and in native gifts, as well as in beauty, she seemed destined by the Fates to be the consort of an emperor. Eutropius, by showing him her portrait and by glowing descriptions of her charms, inflamed the heart of the young ruler with his first passion, and he entered eagerly into the plans of Eutropius to make Eudoxia his wife.

Rufinus meanwhile returned, and prepared the ceremonies of the royal nuptials, as he fancied, of his daughter. "A splendid train of eunuchs and officers issued, in

hymeneal pomp, from the gates of the palace, bearing aloft the diadem, the robes and the inestimable ornaments of the future empress. The solemn procession passed through the streets of the city, which were adorned with garlands and filled with spectators; but when it reached the house of the sons of Promotus, the principal eunuch (Eutropius) respectfully entered the mansion, invested the fair Eudoxia with the imperial robes and conducted her in triumph to the palace and bed of Arcadius." The particulars of the ceremony show that the hymeneal rites of the ancient Greeks, in which the bride was, as it were, forcibly conducted to the house of her husband, were still practised, though without idolatry, by the early Christians.

The secrecy and success of the conspiracy brought great chagrin to the overconfident Rufinus. He felt keenly the insult to himself and his daughter, and he feared the growing power of Eutropius and the new empress. Yet he merely tightened his grip upon the government and continued to be a formidable factor in the intrigues of the palace.

The Empress Eudoxia rapidly adapted herself to her new life and displayed a superiority of sense and spirit which enabled her to maintain over her fond and youthful husband the ascendancy that her beauty had at first created. She soon made it evident that she would be under the control of no intriguing courtier, but that she herself would be a dominant factor in the life of the court. Rufinus continued his plots against the throne of Arcadius, but was constantly thwarted by the empress, assisted by Eutropius, and their counterplays finally brought about the minister's assassination.

After the murder of Rufinus, the empress endeavored to hold the balance of power between the three political parties of the day—the German party, headed by Gainas

the Goth, which largely embraced the military forces of the Empire; the party of Eutropius, who had under his control the civil officers of the state; and the senatorial party, under the leadership of the prefect Aurelian, who abhorred alike the growing influence of the Goths and the bed-chamber administration of Eutropius. Eudoxia naturally inclined to the third of these parties: she strenuously opposed the Germans, who, under the leadership of Gainas, demanded freedom for Arian worship, and she sought to overcome the influence of her quondam benefactor Eutropius, that she herself might have absolute dominion over her imperial husband. Hence, these three, the empress, Eutropius, and Gainas, as Hodgkin remarks, "kept up a vivid game of court intrigue and disputed with varying success for the chief place in that empty chamber which represented the mind of the emperor."

Eudoxia first combined with Gainas to get rid of their powerful rival Eutropius, though she owed her own position to the machinations of the wily chamberlain. Gainas instigated a revolt among the Ostrogoths under their commander Tribigild, and when sent out against them he took no active measures to suppress their incursions; the Goths, at the instigation of Gainas, finally sent word to the emperor demanding the death of Eutropius as the condition of their retiring. Eudoxia, from the palace, joined in the demand and presenting her infant children, Flacilla and Pulcheria, to their father, with a flood of forced tears, implored his justice for some real or imaginary insult which she attributed to the audacious eunuch. The tears of the empress succeeded where the demand of Tribigild had only caused hesitation, and Arcadius signed the death warrant of his favorite. The people rejoiced at the downfall of the minister, whose venality and injustice had aroused the public hatred. Eutropius fled for refuge to the Church of

Saint Sophia, where he was protected by the patriarch Chrysostom. So good an opportunity, however, for impressing the lesson of the fatuity of human greatness was not to be lost, and while the cowering chamberlain lay in humiliation before the altar, Chrysostom preached to a crowded congregation from the text: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," illustrating every argument of his sermon by pointing to the fallen Eutropius—yesterday prime minister of the emperor—to-day a hounded criminal. Chrysostom finally gave him up on condition that he be not put to death, and Eutropius was banished to Cyprus; but the empress and his enemies would not be satisfied with anything less than his death, and he was later recalled and executed at Chalcedon in A. D. 399.

Not long afterward, Gainas met with a like evil destiny, and Eudoxia was left without a rival to dispute her control over the emperor. The weak Arcadius was permitted to spend the remaining years of his life in ease and tranquillity under her mild but absolute control. Henceforth the empress was the most conspicuous figure of the court. Possessing limitless power, it was natural that she should become haughty and rapacious. Endowed with rare beauty and remarkable cleverness, she gave the tone to the court society of Arcadius's reign. Unfortunately, she was fond of all the frivolities of life, and sought at the same time to promote worldliness and religion. Hence, her influence on the ladies of the court was such as to bring upon her the censure of the austere Patriarch of Constantinople, Chrysostom, to whom we are indebted for many glimpses into the life and manners of the fifth century.

The empress was surrounded in the royal palace by a splendor which rivalled that of Persia. Oriental richness and luxury characterized all its appointments. We find exhibited in the court life of the day a blending of the

voluptuousness of the East with the refinement of the Greeks and the luxury of the Romans. Thousands of eunuchs, parasites and slaves, carried out the wishes of the empress. In her royal apartments "the doors were of ivory, the ceilings lined with gold, the floors inlaid with mosaics, or strewed with rich carpets; the walls of the halls and bedrooms were of marble, and wherever commoner stone was used the surface was beautified with gold plate. The beds were of ivory or solid silver, or, if on a less expensive scale, of wood plated with silver or gold. Chairs and stools were usually of ivory, and the most homely vessels were often made of the most costly metal; the semicircular tables or sigmas were so heavy that two youths could hardly lift one. Oriental cooks were employed; and at banquets the atmosphere was heavy with the perfumes of the East, while the harps and pipes of the musicians delighted the ears of the feasters."

Equal attention was paid to the details of dress. The empress was renowned for the gorgeousness of her toilets, which enhanced her personal charms and made her appear the most fascinating lady of her court. Her imperial robes were of the richest character, consisting of purple fabrics, embellished with gold and precious gems.

Such was the external splendor of the court. The Bishop Synesius censures the elaborate court etiquette which surrounded the emperor and empress, keeping them from the knowledge of outside affairs and making them the victims of eunuchs and courtiers. He criticises severely the sensual retirement in which they lived and attributes it to the desire to appear semi-divine.

Some idea of the importance of the empress in affairs of state and of the court etiquette which attended an audience with her can be gained from the extant narrative of Marcus the deacon, who recounts incidents in the visit

of Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza, when he and others came to Constantinople to seek redress from the emperor for injuries inflicted by the heathen on the Christians in Palestine. Knowing that the empress was the real power, the bishop appealed to her, and the narrative tells of his audiences with her and how she obtained for him a favorable answer to his petition. As nothing is more effective in conveying an idea of the ways and manners of an age than the actual words of a contemporary writer, I present a rather free translation of Marcus's narrative.

Upon their arrival at Byzantium, the bishop and his party were honorably received by the Patriarch John Chrysostom, who expressed regret that he could not in person present them to the emperor, because of the royal indignation the empress had excited against him. But he secured the services of the eunuch Amantius, chamberlain of the empress, who arranged for them an audience with Eudoxia.

Amantius took the two bishops and introduced them to the empress, and when she saw them she saluted them first and said: "Give me your blessing, fathers," and they did obeisance to her. Now she was sitting on a golden sofa, and she said to them: "Excuse me, priests of Christ, on account of my situation, for I was anxious to meet your sanctity in the antechamber. But pray God in my behalf that I may be delivered happily of the child which is in my womb." And the bishops, wondering at her condescension, said: "May He who blessed the womb of Sarah and Rebecca and Elizabeth, bless and quicken the child in thine." After further edifying conversation she said to them: "I know why ye came, as the castrensis Amantius explained it to me. But if you are fain to instruct me, fathers, I am at your service." Thus bidden, they told her all about the idolaters, and the impious rites which they fearlessly practised and their oppression of the

Christians, whom they did not allow to perform a public duty, nor to till their lands, "from which produce they pay the dues to your imperial sovereignty." And the empress said: "Do not despond; for I trust in the Lord Christ, the Son of God, that I shall persuade the emperor to do those things that are due to your saintly faith and to dismiss you hence well treated. Depart, then, to your privacy, for you are fatigued, and pray God to coöperate with my request." She then commanded money to be brought, and gave three darics apiece to the most holy bishops, saying: "In the meantime take this for your expenses." And the bishops took the money, and blessed her abundantly, and departed. And when they went out they gave the greater part of the money to the deacons who were standing at the door, reserving little for themselves.

And when the emperor came into the apartment of the empress, she told him all touching the bishops, and requested him that the heathen temples of Gaza should be thrown down. But the emperor was put out when he heard it, and said:

"I know that city is devoted to idols, but it is loyally disposed in the matters of taxation and pays a large sum to the revenue. If then we overwhelm them with terrors of a sudden, they will betake themselves to flight, and we shall lose so much of the revenue. But if it must be, let us afflict them partially, depriving idolaters of their dignities and other public offices, and bid their temples be shut up and be used no longer. For when they are afflicted and straitened on all sides, they will recognize the truth; but an extreme measure coming suddenly is hard on subjects." The empress was very much vexed at this reply, for she was ardent in matters of faith, but she merely said: "The Lord can assist his servants, the Christians, whether we consent or decline."

We learned these details from the chamberlain Amantius. On the morrow the Augusta sent for us, and having first saluted the holy bishops according to her custom, she bade them sit down. And after a long spiritual talk, she said: "I spoke to the emperor, and he was rather put out. But do not despond, for, God willing, I cannot cease until ye be satisfied and depart, having succeeded in your holy purpose." And the bishops made obeisance. Then the saintly Porphyrius, pricked by the spirit, and recollecting the word of the thrice-blessed anchoret Procopius, said to the empress: "Exert yourself for the sake of Christ, and in recompense for your exertions he can bestow on you a son whose life and reign you will see and enjoy for many years."

At these words the empress was filled with joy, and her face flushed, and new beauty beyond that which she already had passed into her face; for the appearance shows what passes within. And she said: "Pray, fathers, that, according to your word, with the will of God, I may bear a male child, and if it so befall, I promise you to do all that ye ask. And another thing, for which ye ask not, I intend to do with the consent of Christ; I will found a church at Gaza in the centre of the city. Depart then in peace, and rest quiet, praying constantly for my happy delivery; for the time of my confinement is near." The bishops commended her to God and left the palace, and prayer was made that she should bear a male child; for we believed in the words of Saint Procopius the anchoret.

And every day we used to proceed to the most holy Johannes, the archbishop, and had the fruition of his holy words, sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. And Amantius the chamberlain used to come to us, sometimes bearing messages from the empress, at other times merely to pay a visit. And after a few days the empress

brought forth a male child, and he was called Theodosius, after his grandfather Theodosius, the Spaniard, who reigned together with Gratian. And the child Theodosius was born in the purple, wherefore he was proclaimed emperor at his birth. And there was great joy in the city, and men were sent to the cities of the Empire, bearing the good news, with gifts and bounties.

But the empress, who had only just been delivered and arisen from her chair of confinement, sent Amantius to us with this message: "I thank Christ that God bestowed on me a son on account of your holy prayers. Pray then, fathers, for his life and for my lowly self, in order that I may fulfil those things which I promised you, Christ himself again consenting, through your holy prayers." And when the seven days of her confinement were fulfilled, she sent for us and met us at the door of the chamber, carrying in her arms the infant in a purple robe. And she inclined her head and said: "Draw nigh, fathers, unto me and the child which the Lord granted to me through your holy prayers." And she gave them the child that they might seal it with God's signet. And the holy bishops sealed both her and the child with the seal of the cross, and, offering a prayer, sat down. And when they had spoken many words full of heart pricking, the lady said to them: "Do ye know, fathers, what I resolved to do in regard to your affairs?" (Here Porphyrius related a dream which he had dreamed the night before: then Eudoxia resumed:) "If Christ permit, the child will be privileged to receive the holy baptism in a few days. Do ye then depart and compose a petition and insert in it all the requests ye wish to make. And when the child comes forth from the holy baptismal rite, give the petition to him who holds the child in his arms; but I will instruct him what to do. And I trust in the Son of God that He can arrange

the whole matter according to the will of His loving kindness." Having received these instructions we blessed her and the infant and went out. Then we composed the petition, inserting many things in the document, not only as to the overthrow of the idols, but also that privileges and revenues should be granted to the holy Church and the Christians; for the holy Church was poor.

The days ran by, and the day on which the young emperor was to be illuminated (*i. e.*, baptized) arrived. And all the city was crowned with garlands and decked out in garments entirely made of silk and gold jewels and all kinds of ornaments, so that no one could describe the adornment of the city. One might behold the inhabitants, multitudinous as the waves, arrayed in all manner of various dresses. But it is beyond my power to describe the brilliance of that pomp; it is a task for those who are practised writers, and I shall proceed to my present true history. When the young Theodosius was baptized and came forth from the church to the palace, you might behold the excellence of the multitude of the magnates and their dazzling raiments, for all were dressed in white, and you would have thought they were covered with snow. The patricians headed the procession with the *illustres* and all other ranks, and the military contingents, all carrying wax candles, so that the stars seemed to shine on earth. And close to the infant, which was carried in arms, was the emperor Arcadius himself, his face cheerful and more radiant than the purple robe he was wearing, and one of the magnates carried the infant in brilliant apparel. And we marvelled, beholding such glory. Then the holy Porphyrius said to us: "If the things which vanish possess such glory, how much more glorious are the things celestial, prepared for the elect, which neither eye hath beheld nor ear heard, nor hath it come into the heart of man to consider!"

And we stood at the portal of the church, with the document of our petition, and when he came forth from the baptism we called aloud, saying, "We petition your Piety," and held out the paper. And he who carried the child seeing this, and knowing our concernment, for the empress had instructed him, and when he received it halted, and he commanded silence, and having unrolled a part he read it, and folding it up, placed his hand under the head of the child, and cried out: "His majesty has ordered the requests contained in the petition to be ratified." And all having seen did obeisance to the emperor, congratulating him that he had the privilege of seeing his son as emperor in his lifetime; and he rejoiced thereat. And that which had happened for the sake of her son was announced to the empress, and she rejoiced and thanked God on her knees. And when the child entered the palace, she met it and received it and kissed it, and, holding it in her arms, greeted the emperor, saying: "You are blessed, my lord, for the things which your eyes have beheld in your lifetime." And the emperor rejoiced thereat. And the empress, seeing him in good humor, said: "Please let us learn what the petition contains that its contents may be fulfilled."

And the emperor ordered the paper to be read; and when it was read, he said: "The request is hard, but to refuse it is harder, since it is the first mandate of our son." Thus the petition was granted, and the empress herself saw to it that all its provisions were fulfilled; and the bishops returned to Palestine well supplied with funds, having obtained all they desired by working on the superstition of the empress, and through her skill in managing the emperor.

The narrative is highly instructive and interesting in the picture it gives of the empress, her outward piety, her joy

at the birth of a son, her superstitious acceptance of the prophecy of the anchoret, and her cleverness in the ruse she devised to win the consent of the emperor. It is an altogether pleasing picture of a religious queen and a devoted mother, and we could wish that all her conduct had conformed to these high ideals. The worldly side of Eudoxia's character appeared in the open war between the empress and the patriarch, which disturbed the later years of the reign of Arcadius.

John Chrysostom was an austere and eloquent prelate, who had studied the art of rhetoric under Libanius and had been brought by Eutropius to Constantinople from Antioch, where he had already achieved great popularity and an enviable reputation for holiness and eloquence. He was a man of saintly life and apostolic fervor, but rash and inconsiderate alike in speech and in action. His charity and eloquence made him the idol of the people, but his free speaking offended the court circles, and his austere manners and autocratic methods made him disliked by the clergy. He thundered against the degeneracy of the wealthy classes and enlarged on the peculiar vices of the aristocrats, to the confusion of the empress and her court ladies and to the delight of the populace.

The worldliness and carnal ambitions of Eudoxia can be judged from the sermons of Chrysostom; and she naturally gave the tone to the ladies of her court. She was not above suspicion of criminal intrigues, as can be inferred from the fact of the rumor prevailing that Count John, a nobleman of the court, was the father of her son Theodosius; but whether this was merely a court scandal cannot at this day be ascertained. With the empress given to worldly vanity, we can imagine the nature of the society over which she presided. "One curious trait of manner indicates clearly enough the tone of the court. It was the

custom of Christian ladies to wear veils or bands over their foreheads, so as to conceal their hair. Women of meretricious life were distinguished by the way they wore their hair cut and combed over their brows, just like modern fringes. The ladies of Eudoxia's court were so immodest, and had such bad taste, as to adopt this fashion from the courtesans. The next step probably was that the example of the court influenced respectable Christian matrons to wear the obnoxious fringe." On the other hand, actresses and public prostitutes retaliated by imitating the dress of consecrated virgins, and this abuse had to be suppressed by legislation. In the aristocratic society of Eudoxia three ladies were especially prominent,—Marsa, the widow of Promotus, a distant relative of the empress; Castricia, the widow of Saturninus; and Eugraphia, who had also lost her husband. These ladies, though no longer young, were rich and fashionable, and endeavored to preserve the appearance of youth by inordinate attention to complexion and to dress. Eugraphia is mentioned as given to using rouge and white lead to preserve her complexion, a habit which was severely condemned by the austere Chrysostom. It was hard to forgive a preacher who reproached the feminine tendency to conceal by cosmetics and dress one's age and ugliness.

Furthermore, the attractions of the theatre and the dissipations of high life engaged the attention of this fashionable set quite as much as did attendance on religious service and outward manifestations of piety. Christianity had not suppressed the licentiousness of the stage or improved the morality of greenrooms. Chrysostom complains of the lawlessness of the theatre and the obscenity of the songs that delighted the audience; he was especially shocked at the exhibitions of women swimming. The professional courtesan, with all the accomplishments of

the actress, was the centre of attraction for the *habitués* of the theatre; and she was even allowed to contaminate fashionable weddings with her presence.

Other types of contemporary society are of interest, especially instances of the ambitious and fashionable lady, not of the aristocracy, who wished to work her way up into the court circle. Synesius gives us the picture of such a one in a celebrated allegory presenting the career of the noble and high-minded Aurelian, head of a patriot party, and of his unscrupulous adversary, who wished to displace him. The subject of the allegory is the contest between the two sons of Taurus, Osivis and Typhos. Osivis represents Aurelian, the type of everything good and laudable; Aurelian's antagonist is figured in Typhos, a perverse, gross, and ignorant person, who favored the German party. He was a profligate Roman, who had been guilty of malversation in office and hoped by his new alliance to return to power. He had an active, though not very discreet, ally in his wife, whom Synesius depicts in pregnant phrases. Owing to her vanity she was her own tirewoman, a reproach which suggests her excessive attention to the details of her toilet. She liked to show herself in grand array in the market place, fancying that the eyes of all were upon her. Owing to her desire to have her drawing rooms filled and to be the object of notoriety, she did not close her doors even against professional courtesans; and we may infer on that account that select Byzantine society was not desirous of her acquaintance. Synesius contrasts with her the wife of Aurelian, who never left the house, and gives us a reminiscence of Thucydides in his sententious expression that it was the greatest virtue of a woman for neither her body nor her name ever to cross the threshold. Aurelian succeeds in winning political honors in spite of the hostility of Typhos

and his wife, much to the disgust of the latter, who saw her intrigues for social laurels defeated.

The ladies of the court and those who wished to be such were in large measure devoted to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. Chrysostom's austere spirit was naturally offended at the life of such a court and of fashionable and aspiring matrons, and in his pastoral visits to these great ladies he undoubtedly rebuked them for their worldliness. Furthermore, in his pulpit he preached valiantly against luxury and worldliness, and would often add point to his remarks by turning his eyes toward the part of the gallery where sat Eudoxia and the ladies of her court. Great umbrage was aroused against him because of his outspoken condemnation of their vices, petty and otherwise, and he was hated as the wicked Herodias hated John the Baptist. His greatest offence was reached in a sermon in which the empress was openly called Jezebel—a statement which led to the spread of the unfounded scandal that she had robbed a widow of a vineyard as Ahab robbed Naboth.

The rank and file of the people enjoyed with great zest these attacks on the aristocrats, and that which stung the great ladies most severely was their being made objects of censure before the mob, as their consciences were sufficiently hardened not to be deeply penetrated by the preacher's shafts. Accordingly, the humiliation of their pride led them to form a conspiracy against Chrysostom, the centre of which was the house of Eugraphia. These ladies readily found allies. The archbishop's austerity of life and rigid discipline had made him many enemies among the bishops, monks, and nuns, for he had attacked the corruption of the clergy as well as the corruption of the court. The sensuality, avarice, and selfishness of the clergy laid them open to attack. Women were admitted to the

monasteries, or lived in the houses of priests as "spiritual sisters," a custom that gave rise to much scandal. Still more scandalous was the conduct of the order of deaconesses who, while not following the fashions of the court, yet adorned their austere garb "with an immodest coquetry which made them more piquant than an ordinary courtesan." Chrysostom was especially severe on the monks, who would linger about Constantinople for the sake of its licentious pleasures instead of betaking themselves to their natural fields of labor.

Though Chrysostom had his enemies among the fair sex, he had also his circle of admirers, who were the more ardent in their attentions because of the persecutions he had to undergo. The most distinguished and the most devoted of these was the aristocratic Olympias, whose mother was at one time betrothed to an emperor, but who was wedded to a king of Armenia, and afterward became the wife of a Roman noble. Olympias was renowned for her benevolence toward the poor and her constancy to Chrysostom in his troubles, while her kindness of heart and sweetness of spirit give her rank among the "good" women of the period. Another constant friend was a Moorish princess, Salvina, who had been placed as a hostage in Theodosius's charge by her father, and had been married to the empress's nephew. In contrast to the restless activity of the ladies about Eudoxia, she led a quiet and peaceful life devoted to good works, and Chrysostom, in a "letter to a young widow," contrasts the serenity and happiness she enjoyed with the turbulent life of her father.

Chrysostom's sharp reproofs of the worldly minded, his close friendships with Olympias and other ladies, whom he at times received alone in his episcopal residence, and his retired, ascetic life, gave pretext for unwarranted

charges. His enemies even went so far as to assert that under the cover of his unsocial habits he conducted "Cyclopean orgies" in his home.

An official journey which he made for the regulation of the affairs of the churches, during which he removed many unworthy bishops, aroused much umbrage against him, and gave his enemies at home an opportunity to injure him. Severian, whom he left in his place, was an especial favorite of the empress, and joined the court league against his superior. Upon his return, Chrysostom acted with his customary decision. Hearing of the unbecoming conduct of his subordinate, he severely and openly attacked his time-serving relations with the empress, and, when Severian grew defiant, promptly excommunicated him. Owing to the entreaties of the empress and the emperor, however, he withdrew the ban and restored Severian to his office.

Soon afterward a louder storm burst, and from a new quarter. Theophilus, the worldly prelate of Alexandria, was induced by the court ladies to undertake their cause against the patriarch. He came to Constantinople and took up his quarters in the palace of Placidia, and from this centre, as well as from the house of Eugraphia, a violent warfare of words was waged against Chrysostom.

The emperor was prevailed upon to grant a synod for the trial of the patriarch, which was held outside the city, owing to the strength of the latter's adherents. Chrysostom was condemned by the packed assembly, known as the "Synod of the Oak," and formally deposed. The city was in an uproar. Chrysostom retired to Bithynia, but the people demanded his return, and he was recalled from banishment and restored to his office. Had he now adopted a policy of quiet tolerance, all would have been well, but very soon an occasion arose which led him to

make a further attack on Eudoxia. In September, 403, a statue of silver on a column of porphyry was erected to the empress near the precincts of Saint Sophia. Chrysostom took occasion to censure severely the adulation of the populace, and by his remarks he must have mortally offended the pride of the empress, for henceforth even the mild emperor declined to have any communication with the patriarch.

The next year a new synod was held, and the action of the Synod of the Oak was confirmed. The emperor ratified the sentence, and Chrysostom quietly yielded to the inevitable and retired from the city. As soon as the people heard of the occurrence, another uproar followed, which resulted in the conflagration of Saint Sophia and other buildings and in the persecution of many adherents of the exiled patriarch. Olympias and many others were condemned to exile. "Among those who anticipated the sentence by flight was an old maid named Nicarete, who deserves mention as a curious figure of the time. She was a philanthropist who devoted her means to works of charity, and who always went about with a chest of drugs, which she used to dispose of gratuitously, and which rumor said were always effectual."

Meanwhile, Chrysostom was transported to a remote town among the ridges of Mount Taurus, in Lesser Armenia. He suffered many hardships, but he was sustained by the sympathy of his friends, especially Olympias, with whom he corresponded, and who never told him of the persecutions she herself underwent in his behalf. Her own last years, however, were darkened by her afflictions, and Chrysostom tried to lighten her melancholy by his letters of consolation. Her saintly life cast a halo about her memory after she passed away, and a legend was current in later times that her encoffined body

had, by her own directions, been cast into the sea at Nicomedia, whence it was borne to Constantinople, and thence to Brochthi, where it reposed in the Church of Saint Thomas.

Chrysostom's last years were perhaps his most useful ones, being spent in regulating by letter the affairs of the churches. The Pope at Rome never ratified his condemnation, and he was universally beloved as one subjected to unjust persecution. Owing to his undiminished prominence in all Church affairs, the ruthless empress pursued him in his exile, and an order was despatched for him to be transported to Pityus, a desolate place on the south-eastern coast of the Euxine; but on the way thither he expired from exhaustion, in the sixtieth year of his age. He was the last of the patriarchs to stand out against the corruption and the frivolity of the court, and henceforth the archbishops were but subservient adherents of the emperor and the empress.

His innocence and merit were acknowledged by the succeeding generation, and thirty years later, at the earnest solicitation of the people, Chrysostom's remains were brought to Constantinople. The Emperor Theodosius advanced to receive them as far as Chalcedon, and implored the forgiveness of the injured saint in the name of his guilty parents, Arcadius and Eudoxia.

Less than four years after the birth of her son, Theodosius, Eudoxia, in the bloom of her youth and the height of her power, came to her end as the result of a miscarriage; and this untimely death confounded the prophecy of Porphyrius of Gaza, who had foretold that she would live to see the reign of her son. Pious Catholics saw in her untimely death the vengeance of Heaven for the persecution of Saint Chrysostom; and few save the emperor and her children bewailed the loss of the worldly and ambitious empress.

Chapter X

The Rival Empresses—Pulcheria and Eudocia

X

THE RIVAL EMPRESSES—PULCHERIA AND EUDOCIA

BESIDE the deathbed of the gentle Arcadius, whom destiny snatched from life in the fulness of manhood, stood four weeping orphans of tenderest years, three maidens and a little lad—all too young to realize the greatness of their loss. These were the seven-year-old Theodosius, heir to the throne, the nine-year-old Pulcheria and her two younger sisters, Arcadia and Marina. In the orphanage of the children, it was natural that the eldest daughter should feel that upon herself rested the responsibility of acting as mother to her brother and sisters; and Pulcheria possessed the mental endowments and the rapidly developing nature which peculiarly fitted her for this task. Fortunately the administration of the Empire was in the hands of the prætorian prefect Anthemius, a wise and able counsellor, who acted as the guardian of the young prince and his sisters and directed their education. He, with the Patriarch Atticus, who was their religious guide and spiritual adviser, provided them with every possible advantage for intellectual and spiritual growth. Pulcheria early exhibited an earnest and almost manly intelligence. Along with the sympathetic and mystical temperament of a saint, she possessed the strong, practical sense of her grandfather, Theodosius the Great. Hence she was quick

to turn her attention to problems of statecraft and displayed a precocious capacity for administration. Her duties as guardian of her brother and sisters also developed her innate love of mastery, so that as a child she gradually conceived a longing for the duties and responsibilities of the imperial station.

At the tender age of fourteen, Pulcheria began to win influence in state affairs. Proud and ambitious like her mother Eudoxia, she sought as rapidly as possible to assert her authority; and, as her power and influence grew, that of Anthemius gradually ceased to exert itself. By no other hypothesis can we explain why Anthemius at this time retired from active duties and did not retain his office as regent at least until two years later, when Theodosius, in his fifteenth year, should attain his majority.

On July 4, 414, Pulcheria, the daughter of an emperor, assumed, contrary to all precedent, the title of Augusta, previously reserved exclusively for the wives of emperors, and formally took upon herself the honor and the duties of regent in the name of her brother, who was still a minor. So thoroughly did she gain the ascendency over the young prince that even after he was created Augustus two years later she retained her title and continued to be the real power in the imperial palace; indeed, she was for forty years virtually the ruler of the Eastern Empire.

The children of Arcadius and Eudoxia inherited the religious temperament of their father rather than the worldly disposition of their mother. Consequently, the court of Theodosius the Younger formed a great contrast to that of Arcadius. Pulcheria determined to embrace a life of celibacy. Resolving to remain a virgin, she induced her sisters to join with her in vows of perpetual virginity. They were confirmed in this step by their spiritual father, Atticus, who wrote for the princesses a book in which he

dwelt on the beauty of the single life. In the presence of the clergy and the assembled people of Constantinople the three daughters of Arcadius dedicated their virginity to God; and their solemn vows were inscribed on a tablet of gold and jewels, which was publicly offered in the Church of Saint Sophia. Pious souls saw in this vow of Pulcheria only the natural result of her strict piety and her unselfish love for her brother; but profane historians attributed it to her extraordinary prudence, which was with her a gift of nature, and to her unbounded ambition—on the ground that she could thus maintain permanently her ascendency over the young prince, and, by controlling his marriage, share his power.

In her manner of life, however, Pulcheria emphasized the genuineness of her piety. The imperial palace, as says a contemporary, assumed the character of a cloister. All males, except saintly men who had forgotten the distinction of sexes, were excluded from the holy threshold. Pulcheria and a chosen band of Christian damsels formed a sort of religious community. Spiritual practices were carried on, with strict punctuality, from morning till evening. Whereas richly clad senators and officers in sumptuous raiment had earlier passed in and out of the palace, so now the black robes of priests and the dark cowls of monks were to be seen thronging the entrance, and in place of the joyous songs of banquetings and festivities, one could hear the monotonous intoning of psalms. The vanity of dress which had scandalized the court of Eudoxia was discarded, and the simple garb of nuns was the prevailing fashion of the palace. The princesses did not employ themselves in personal adornment or in the many vanities of royal station, but spent much of their time at the loom, weaving garments for the poor and needy. A frugal diet was adopted, and even this was interrupted by

frequent fasts. Thus Pulcheria and her maidens wearied not in their saintly life and in the performance of deeds of mercy.

These outward exercises of piety were attended by sumptuous beneficences for the spread of the Christian religion. Magnificent churches were built in various parts of the Empire at the expense of Pulcheria; charitable foundations for the benefit of the poor and the unfortunate were established in Constantinople and elsewhere, and ample donations were given by her for the perpetual maintenance of monastic societies. This imperial saint, who thus devoted a large part of her time and energies to the performance of religious duties and of charitable undertakings, naturally enjoyed the peculiar favor of the Deity. There is a tradition that the knowledge of the location of sacred relics and intimation of future events were communicated to her in dreams and revelations. The common people attributed healing power to her. Pulcheria's virtues aroused in the populace a feeling of admiration, and the saintly life of the palace awakened and spread a deep spiritual influence throughout the Empire.

Religion, however, was accompanied with culture, and Pulcheria, with the aid of the best masters, had her brother and sisters trained in all the various branches of knowledge acquired up to that time. Under her direction Theodosius became a student of natural science; and so great was his skill in writing and in illuminating manuscripts that he received the name of Calligraphus. Pulcheria acquired an elegant and familiar command of both Greek and Latin; and she displayed her intellectual discipline, and gift of expression on the various occasions of speaking or writing on public business.

Yet Pulcheria's devotion to religion and to learning never diverted her indefatigable attention from public affairs.

She strengthened the influence of the senate and supported it in the reform of many abuses which had crept in during the ascendancy of the eunuchs of the palace and the struggles with the German party; but her energies were chiefly directed toward acting as counsellor to the emperor, and protecting him from the intrigues of court officials, to which his weak character made him an easy victim. She instructed her brother in the art of government, yet the tenderness of her discipline seems to have made him rather a willing instrument in her own hands than an independent monarch. Possibly she realized that the elements which go to form a great ruler were lacking in his character; possibly her own love of power blinded her to the right course of action toward her confiding ward. At any rate, "her precepts may countenance some suspicion of the extent of her capacity or the purity of her intention. She taught him to maintain a grave and majestic deportment; to walk, to hold his robe, to seat himself on his throne in a manner worthy of a great prince; to abstain from laughter; to listen with condescension; to return suitable answers; to assume, by turns, a serious or a placid countenance; in a word, to represent with grace and dignity the external figure of a Roman emperor."

Though so careful and systematic in her training of the young prince, Pulcheria did not deprive his boyhood of those companionships which add zest to youthful pursuits and recreation and stimulate the growth of manly qualities. She gave him as comrades two bright and spirited youths, Paulinus and Placitus, with whom he associated in open-hearted intimacy and who were destined to play a prominent part in his reign. Paulinus especially became his most trusted friend, and the two were united for many years by bonds which resembled those of Damon and Pythias. Amid such surroundings and under such

influence, Theodosius grew up. The product of Pulcheria's instruction, however, was a ruler who descended below even the weakness of her father and uncle. Chaste, temperate, merciful, superstitious, pious, he was rich in negative qualities; but, being feeble in energy and lacking all initiative, he became merely a good-hearted and well-meaning, instead of active and courageous, ruler. Consequently in every official act it was Pulcheria who supplied the wisdom and the energy which made the earlier years of Theodosius's reign such happy and peaceful ones. Pulcheria, however, was content to keep her power in the background and to attribute to the genius of the emperor the smoothness with which the wheels of government turned, as well as the mildness and prosperity of his reign.

The choice of a wife for Theodosius naturally lay in the hands of Pulcheria. The young prince, influenced by the example of his father, had expressed to his sister his preference for rare physical perfection and high intellectual endowments over exalted station and royal blood in the choice of a consort; and Pulcheria, in conjunction with his boyhood friend Paulinus, set herself to the task of finding in the capital or in the provinces an ideal corresponding to the wishes of the imperial youth. Yet, while they were engaged in the search, by happy chance a wonderful concatenation of events in the pagan city of Athens determined the destiny of the nineteen-year-old ruler.

In the story of Athenais we have the beautiful romance of a maiden of modest station raised by destiny to the exalted dignity of a throne. She was the favorite child of Leontius, an Athenian philosopher, who devoted most of his time to training his daughter in the religion and philosophy of his native city, and who sought to cultivate in her all that charm of manner and richness of temperament which characterized the Greek women in the best days of ancient

Athens. The story goes that the old philosopher was so confident that, because of her beauty and intellectual gifts, a high destiny awaited his daughter, that he bequeathed her as a legacy only a hundred pieces of gold, while he divided the bulk of his estate between his two sons, Valerius and Genesius. The brothers, being avaricious by nature and jealous of the superior qualities of their sister, treated her with neglect and cruelty in her distress. Athenais implored them to repair the obvious injustice and to grant her her rights, representing to them how she did not deserve this disgrace and that the indigence of their sister would be to them, if not a cause of grief, yet certainly a continual reproach; but her brothers would not listen to her appeals, and finally drove her from the paternal mansion. Fortunately, a maternal aunt resided in Athens, who received the disinherited maiden into her home and warmly espoused her cause. She brought Athenais to Constantinople, where another aunt dwelt, and made arrangements for the maiden to bring suit against the hard-hearted brothers. To influence the decision, Athenais and her aunt obtained audience with Pulcheria, and thus the link was formed which joined the destinies of the young emperor and the hapless orphan.

The youthful plaintiff was her own advocate, and so effectually did she argue her case that the Augusta, charmed by the penetration and cleverness which her speech revealed, as well as by the wonderful beauty and modest demeanor of the maiden, was irresistibly forced to the conviction that this girl was the very one who embodied the ideals and longings of the young prince. And, in fact, Athenais was physically and intellectually endowed in a manner seldom equalled. Imagine a maiden of tall and slender proportions of figure, of rare perfection of form, of fair complexion, of dark and luminous eyes which

revealed the sweetness and subtlety of the spirit within, while the perfect outline of the countenance was framed by a luxuriant abundance of golden locks,—and you have some conception of the stranger who stood with queenly grace before the proud Augusta. Furthermore, every word that she uttered revealed the rare subtlety of understanding or warmth of sensibilities of the petitioner, who was in every regard the perfect picture of a symmetrically developed maiden. So soon as Pulcheria ascertained that Athenais was of good family and was still unmarried, she began to carry out her plans as a royal matchmaker. She aroused the curiosity of her brother by her account of the charms of the Greek maiden, and the recital inspired in the young prince a lively impatience to see Athenais. He besought his sister to arrange an opportunity for him, unobserved, to see the maiden, and Pulcheria readily devised a plan. After having concealed Theodosius and Paulinus behind the tapestries in her apartment, she summoned Athenais to come to her for a further interview. Athenais entered the room, and the young men were so charmed by the view that Theodosius, enamored of the maiden at first sight, desired to make her his bride.

What must have been the emotions of the disinherited orphan, when the Augusta, instead of granting her petition, told her that she was chosen to be the bride of an emperor? Only one obstacle to the union presented itself, —the pagan faith of the beautiful Athenian. While winning her heart for himself, the pious Theodosius longed to win her soul for the Saviour. To the patriarch Atticus was assigned the pleasing task of convincing the beautiful maiden of the errors of paganism and of guiding her spirit into the ways of eternal truth. The pure heart of the gentle Athenais proved readily susceptible to the beauties of Christian teaching; the waters of baptism were

supposed to remove from her nature the last vestiges of pagan unbelief; and in accordance with the wishes of her betrothed, the converted Athenais received the baptismal name of Eudocia.

Finally, on June 7, 421, the royal nuptials were celebrated with great pomp, amid the rejoicings of the populace. The prudent Pulcheria, however, withheld from the bride of the emperor the title of Augusta until the union was blessed by the birth of a daughter, who was named Eudoxia, after her grandmother, and who, fifteen years later, became the wife of Valentinian III., ruler of the Western Empire.

The brothers of Eudocia richly deserved the resentment of the new empress. They had fled from Athens when they heard of the elevation of their despised sister, but she had them sought out and brought to Constantinople. They entered into her presence trembling and disconcerted; but instead of punishing them, as they felt they well deserved, Eudocia received them in a friendly manner and forgave them for their base conduct. Regarding them as the unconscious instruments of her elevation, the new empress gave them part in some of the highest offices of state.

Having become a Christian, Eudocia dedicated her talents to the honor of religion and to the glory of her husband. She indited religious poems which were the admiration of the age. She composed a poetical paraphrase of the five books of Moses, of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, and of the prophecies of Daniel and Zechariah. She devoted three books of verse to the legend of Saint Cyprian, who was a martyr in the persecution inaugurated by Diocletian. She wrote a panegyric on the Persian victories of Theodosius; and there is extant from her pen a cento of Homeric verse treating the life and miracles of Christ. She also

manifestly exerted a strong influence in the founding of the University of Constantinople, if we judge from the preponderance of Greek chairs. She also encouraged in every manner the cultivation of Greek letters; and the support she gave to Greek poets and littérateurs gave umbrage to the narrow religionists, who regarded everything Greek as pagan.

Eudocia, by her beauty and sprightliness, rapidly gained an ascendancy over the weak but noble-hearted emperor, who had now two masters, his sister and his wife. The new empress, in spite of her devotion to religion, still retained some pagan leanings, and the monastic life of the court began to undergo a change. Both the empress-sister and the empress-wife were ladies of strong will, and Eudocia by degrees became less sensitive to the gratitude she owed Pulcheria because of her elevation. Hence, as each of the Augustas endeavored to have her own way, there arose discord in the imperial family. Intriguing courtiers and bishops knew how to take advantage of the division of sentiment in the royal household, and, while there was no public outbreak, the wheels of government did not run so smoothly as when Pulcheria held uncontested sway. The rivalry and dissension in the court between the two empresses showed itself particularly in the religious controversies of the time, and especially in the so-called Nestorian heresy regarding the dual nature of Christ. Pulcheria throughout was opposed to Nestorianism, as to every doctrine which flavored of Greek metaphysics, while Eudocia is credited with being an advocate of the new doctrine. Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria and the principal opponent of Nestorius, left no stone unturned to win the favor and support of Pulcheria, while ecclesiastics of the opposite party doubtless attempted the same with Eudocia.

The result of this conflict of opinion between the rival empresses was that the policy of Theodosius was always wavering; he was consistent neither in orthodoxy nor heterodoxy. At first a partisan of Nestorius, he responded rather sharply to the appeals of Cyril; but he afterward went over entirely to the opposite side—an indication that the influence of Pulcheria was once more paramount.

Thus passed the first decade and a half of Eudocia's reign. Finally in 438 occurred an event of momentous interest to the entire Roman world—the marriage of the princess Eudoxia with Valentinian III., Emperor of the West. As it seemed likely that Eudocia would never bear a son to Theodosius, the union of the two reigning houses meant possibly the reunion of the Empire under one emperor, should a son be born to the newly married couple. Possibly feeling lonely after the marriage and departure of her daughter; possibly tiring of the intrigues of the court, Eudocia, with the concurrence of the emperor, shortly afterward undertook a solemn pilgrimage to Jerusalem to discharge her vows and to return thanks to the Deity for the welfare of her daughter.

Attended by a royal cortége of courtiers and eunuchs and slaves, the Empress Eudocia set out on her journey. Her ostentatious progress through the East hardly seems in keeping with the spirit of Christian humility. One of the most impressive events of her journey was the sojourn in Antioch, the metropolis of the Far East. Here she pronounced to the senate, from a throne of gold, studded with precious gems, an eloquent Greek oration, which was regarded as a marvel of Hellenic rhetoric. In Antioch, probably far more than in Constantinople or Alexandria, there was a hearty appreciation of Greek culture and art, and many of the renowned rhetoricians of the day had in this city their lecture halls, to which thronged enthusiastic

students; and to the most cultivated audience of the metropolis was granted the presence of an empress glorying in her Athenian nativity, trained in all the rhetorical art of the Greek, and combining in her own personality all that was most pleasing in both pagan and Christian culture. The last words of Eudocia's address—a quotation from Homer—are said to have occasioned prolonged applause:

τῆς τοι γενεῆς τε καὶ αἵματος εὔχομαι εἶναι—Iliad Z 211.

"I boast to be of your own race and blood."

Eudocia was also generous in her gifts to the city. She induced the emperor to enlarge its walls, and herself bestowed upon it a donation of two hundred pounds of gold to restore the public baths. She graciously accepted the statues which were decreed to her in gratitude for her munificence—a statue of gold erected in the Curia, and one of bronze in the museum. To the empress, with her earlier love of the sacred traditions of the city of the violet crown, her enthusiastic reception in the most thoroughly Hellenized city of the Orient must have been a most gratifying occurrence.

From Antioch the empress probably followed the pilgrims highway to the Holy Land. There with doubly chastened soul the cultivated convert visited the places hallowed by the Saviour's sufferings and glory. From Bethlehem, where the Mother found shelter in a stable, and therein "in a manger laid" the newborn Redeemer, to receive the adoration of the shepherds, on through the country which the Lord travelled in His mission, till finally she beheld Mount Calvary and looked upon the place of the Sepulchre, now marked by the Christian temple raised by Helena. Her presence brings to mind the visit of this Helena, the Emperor Constantine's mother, one

hundred years before, but the Greek matron must have beheld it with very different emotions. She had been reared in the philosophers' gardens of Athens, amid the glories of the Parthenon and the many wonderful works of art which the Greek genius had created, and in her new home in Constantinople she had not been altogether weaned from the traditions of her youth. In glowing contrast to ancient Athens she now saw a city whose prized monuments were the chapels erected on spots rendered sacred by the footsteps of the Christ and the relics of saints and martyrs. To this city she came as a Christian pilgrim, and her devoutness of spirit showed that her heathen culture, in which she took a pardonable pride, had been consecrated to the religion she professed, and her endeavor to relieve the sufferings of the poor and the unfortunate proved that she had learned the lesson of caring for others from the example of the Master.

Her alms and pious foundations in the Holy Land exceeded even those of the great Helena; and the destitute of the land had reason to be grateful to the empress for her unbounded liberality. In return for her zeal, she had the conscious satisfaction of returning to Constantinople with some of the most sacred relics of the Church—the chains of Saint Peter, the relics of Saint Stephen, and a portrait of the Virgin Mary, reputed to be from the brush of Saint Luke. The first martyr's relics were deposited with great ceremony in the chapel of Saint Laurence, and the piety of the empress won for her the loving admiration of the devout populace.

But this pilgrimage to Jerusalem, with its many tokens of the affection of her subjects, and her triumphal return to the capital city, marks the termination of the glory of the Athenian maiden as empress of the East. Then began the rivalries and conflicts which finally brought about

Eudocia's downfall. To understand these we must first of all take into consideration the difference of temperament of the two empresses. Pulcheria was essentially Roman; Eudocia was essentially Greek. Pulcheria belonged to the orthodox party which strictly condemned everything which savored in the least degree of paganism; Eudocia encouraged Greek art and letters and lent a friendly ear to the heresies which were the product of Greek speculation. Pulcheria was puritanical and austere in her manner of life, while Eudocia had a fondness for dress and for the innocent gayeties of life which characterized the women of her race. It was utterly impossible for two women of such marked difference of temperament to live in perfect harmony under the same roof.

Furthermore, during Eudocia's absence a new factor had entered prominently into the life of the palace. The influence of the eunuchs, which had been so marked during the reign of Arcadius, had not made itself felt during the earlier years of Theodosius's reign, because of the ascendency of the two women, but it gathered strength by degrees as years passed. Antiochus was the first chamberlain to make himself powerful, and upon his fall, the eunuch Chrysaphius, because of his personal beauty and winning manner, won the favor of Theodosius and acquired the art of bending the emperor to his will. Chrysaphius knew also how to play the two empresses off against each other, so as to gain his own ends.

It seems altogether probable that immediately after her return from Jerusalem, the spouse of the emperor more than ever dominated the court at Constantinople. An important indication of this was the prominence of one of her favorites during the years 439–441—Cyrus of Panopolis, who was a poet of renown, a "Greek" in faith, and a student of art and literature. He won great popularity

during his long tenure of office as prefect of the city. He restored Constantinople on so magnificent a scale, after it had experienced a disastrous earthquake, that the people once cried out in the circus: "Constantine built the city, but Cyrus renewed it."

The type of culture represented by Cyrus and Eudocia, and the manifest sympathy between them, greatly offended the strictly orthodox, who regarded it in the light of a Christian duty to sever all connection with paganism, and who considered all tolerance of the Muses and Graces of a more beautiful past to be a heinous sin. This religious party found their ideal and their inspiration in Pulcheria, and she in consequence became their natural leader. Hence, both their natural proclivities and the zeal of their followers forced the two empresses into an attitude of rivalry which could only be settled by the retirement or fall of one or the other of them.

Shortly after her return it seems that Eudocia, in union with Chrysaphius, succeeded in lessening the influence of Pulcheria. So thoroughly did she control her weak but fond husband that Pulcheria withdrew from the palace to the retirement of her villa at Hebdomon, and it has even been asserted that Theodosius, at the request of his wife, meditated making his sister take orders as a deaconess, so that she would have to relinquish her secular power. Thus for a time Eudocia experienced the keen delight of sole and uncontested power. But the retirement of the Augusta, who had for so many years exercised the paramount influence in the court, was the very step to arouse the orthodox and to lead them to undertake every form of intrigue for the ruin of Eudocia and the return of Pulcheria. The result was that, after enjoying for a brief period the sole supremacy, Eudocia fell from the loftiest heights of supreme authority into the deepest depths of humiliation and sorrow.

The orthodox party, with a cleverness which discounted the aims of the nobility, utilized the jealousy of Theodosius as the lever to overturn the beautiful and talented empress. Paulinus had been the boyhood friend of Theodosius, and their intimacy had grown with the passing of the years. He had ardently approved the prince's determination to make the Athenian maiden his wife, and had acted as his best man in the wedding festivities. Owing to the affectionate relations between the two men, Paulinus had enjoyed a free association with both emperor and empress, unhindered by the restricting bonds of court etiquette; and his relations with Eudocia were always of the most friendly and open-hearted character. These relations the enemies of Eudocia seized upon for the attainment of their ends, and their attempt succeeded only too well. It is fitting to tell the story in the words of John Malalas, the earliest chronicler who records it:

"It so happened," says the chronicler, "that as the Emperor Theodosius was proceeding to the church *In Sanctis Theophaniis,* the master of offices, Paulinus, being indisposed on account of an ailment in his foot, remained at home and made an excuse. But a certain poor man brought to Theodosius a Phrygian apple, of enormously large size, and the emperor was surprised at it, and all his court. And straightway the emperor gave one hundred and fifty nomismata to the man who brought the apple, and sent it to Eudocia Augusta; and the Augusta sent it to Paulinus, the master of offices, as being a friend of the emperor. But Paulinus, not being aware that the emperor had sent it to the empress, took it and sent it to the Emperor Theodosius, even as he was entering the palace. And when the emperor received it, he recognized it and concealed it. And having called Augusta, he questioned her, saying:

"'Where is the apple that I sent you?' And she said, 'I ate it.'—Then he caused her to swear the truth by his salvation, whether she ate it or sent it to some one; and she swore, 'I sent it unto no man, but ate it.' And the emperor commanded the apple to be brought, and showed it to her. And he was indignant against her, suspecting that she was enamored of Paulinus, and sent him the apple and denied it. And on this account Theodosius put Paulinus to death. And the Empress Eudocia was grieved, and thought herself insulted, for it was known everywhere that Paulinus was slain on account of her, for he was a very handsome young man. And she asked the emperor that she might go the holy place to pray; and he allowed her; and she went down from Constantinople to Jerusalem to pray."

In the opinion of Gregorovius, Eudocia's apple of Phrygia eludes interpretation as completely as Eve's apple of Eden, but Bury explains the story as an example of Oriental metaphor. He recalls a parallel to it in the *Arabian Nights,* and fancies that its germ may have been an allegorical mode of expression in which someone covertly told the story of the suspected intrigue. In Hellenistic romance the apple was a conventional love gift, and when presented to a man by a woman signified a declaration of love. Hence, as the basis of the tale was presumed to be the amorous intercourse of Paulinus and the empress, we can conceive one accustomed to Oriental allegory saying or writing that Eudocia had given her precious apple to Paulinus, symbolizing thereby that she had surrendered her chastity.

Such is the legend of the fall of the empress. All we know for certain is that about this time a marked discord between husband and wife was apparent, and that Paulinus, the emperor's boyhood friend and most trusted confidant, was put to death by imperial order during the year 440.

History seems entitled to draw the conclusion that it was probably a charge, whether true or false, of a criminal attachment between Eudocia and Paulinus that led to the disgrace of the empress and the execution of the minister; but the probabilities are all in favor of the innocence of the Augusta. Eudocia had passed the age of forty when the breach with her husband occurred, and Paulinus was an official of mature years. The conduct of both had always been above reproach, and it was almost inconceivable that either would have acted unbecomingly at this late date.

For two or three years after the execution of Paulinus the empress remained at court, under what circumstances and in just what relation to the emperor we are not informed. It is evident, however, that her power was gone. Feeling herself more and more relegated to the background, and ever watched by hostile eyes, it was natural that she should find life at Constantinople unbearable, and should long for a place where, far from the turmoils and intrigues of the world, she might devote herself to retirement and to pious practices. She therefore asked permission of the emperor to be allowed to retire to Jerusalem and there pass the rest of her life. After the tender bond of love which had for twenty years united the Athenian maiden and the royal prince had once been violently broken, there was no reason why her petition should be denied, and Eudocia was granted the privilege of retiring to the sacred scenes whose solitude and religious atmosphere had already appealed to her.

So, some years after her first visit to the holy city, Eudocia withdrew thither for a permanent abode. But what a contrast had a few years wrought! With what different emotions did she now visit the sacred shrines! Then a beloved wife, a happy mother, an all-puissant empress! Now a voluntary exile, a discredited wife, an

empress but in name! Theodosius left her her royal honors and abundant means for her station, so that she could not only have a moderate establishment at Jerusalem, but could also adorn the city with charitable institutions. Yet even here the hatred of her enemies and the jealousy of the emperor followed her. Though so far from Constantinople, court spies watched and reported her every movement, and in their malignity they recounted to the emperor such a slanderous picture of her life and doings that he, in the year 444, with newly awakened jealousy, had two holy men—the presbyter Severus and the deacon John, who had been favorites of Eudocia in Constantinople and had followed her to Jerusalem—executed by the order of Saturninus, her chamberlain. This cruel deed, however, did not remain unavenged, for Eudocia did not interfere when Saturninus, in a monkish riot, or at the hands of hired murderers, lost his life. Theodosius punished her for this with undue severity, by removing all the officers who attended her and reducing her to private station.

The remainder of the life of Eudocia, sixteen long years, was spent in retirement and in holy exercises. Troubles heaped themselves upon her. Her only daughter, whose future at her marriage with Valentinian had looked so promising, also lost her royal station and was led a captive from Rome to Carthage. She had to endure all the insults which could fall to one who from supreme power had been reduced to private station. But in the consolation of religion and in self-sacrificing devotion to others more unfortunate, Eudocia found solace in her grief. Finally, in the sixty-seventh year of her age, after experiencing all the vicissitudes of human life, the philosopher's daughter expired at Jerusalem, protesting with her dying breath her faithfulness to her marriage vows and expressing forgiveness of all those who had injured her.

In Constantinople, Eudocia's fall and exile had brought Pulcheria and the orthodox party again to the front. The poetry-loving Cyrus, the head of the Greek party, was deprived of his office and compelled to take orders; and there was a return to the austerity which had characterized the earlier years of Pulcheria's supremacy. Pulcheria and orthodoxy from this time on controlled the court life and dominated the Empire. Finally, in 450, Theodosius was fatally wounded while hunting, and upon his demise Pulcheria was unanimously proclaimed Empress of the East. Her first official act was one of popular justice as well as private revenge—the execution of the crafty and rapacious eunuch, Chrysaphius. In obedience to the murmur of the people, who objected to a woman being sole ruler of the Empire, she selected an imperial consort in Marcian, an aged senator who would respect the virginal vows and superior rank of his wife. He was solemnly invested with the imperial purple, and proved in every way equal to the demands of his exalted station.

Three years later, Pulcheria passed away. Because of her austerity of life, her deeds of charity, her advocacy of orthodoxy, she won the eulogies of the Church; but her controlling attribute had been a love of power, which had wrought much evil. Our sympathies are naturally with the beautiful and gifted Athenais, a Greek by birth, by temperament and by culture, but yet a Christian in religious fervor and pious practices, whose personal fascination had given her the authority she richly merited, until the stronger nature of Pulcheria, by despicable means, had wrought her downfall.

For four years after the death of Pulcheria, Marcian continued to hold supreme power; finally, in 457, he too came to his end, and with Marcian the house of Theodosius the Great ceased to reign in new Rome.

Chapter XI

The Empress Theodora

XI

THE EMPRESS THEODORA

THERE are few stranger episodes in literary history than the fate of Theodora, the celebrated consort of the Emperor Justinian. To us in this day she is a Magdalene elevated to the throne of the Cæsars, a beautiful and licentious actress suddenly raised by a freak of fortune to rule the destinies of the Roman Empire. All this is due to the remarkable discovery made by Nicholas Alemannus, librarian of the Vatican, toward the end of the seventeenth century, of the *Secret History of Procopius,* a work which purported to reveal the private life of the Byzantine court in the days of Justinian. Before the publication of this work Theodora was in public opinion chiefly remarkable for the prominent place she occupied in Justinian's reign. Of her early life nothing was known, but from the date of her accession to the throne she had exercised a sovereign influence over the emperor. In an important crisis she had exhibited admirable firmness and courage. She had taken an active part in the court intrigues and religious controversies of the epoch, and to her sagacity the emperor attributed many of his happiest inspirations in legislation. The ecclesiastical historians accused her of serious lapses into heresy and of having laid violent hands on the sacred person of a pope; but, with all their vituperation, there never was in circulation a calumny affecting her

personal character. Such is a brief résumé of the history of Theodora as handed down unassailed for a thousand years.

Then suddenly a startling revelation was made to the world concerning the previously unknown period of Theodora's life. Alemannus disinterred from the archives of the Vatican library, where it had long lain forgotten, an *Arcana Historia* which purported to be from the pen of the celebrated historian of the *Wars* and the *Edifices* of Justinian. Edited with a learned commentary by a hostile critic, the work immediately attained wide circulation and universal credence. For the first time the character of the illustrious empress was presented in the blackest colors. The world, it seemed, had been really mistaken in its estimate. Theodora's antecedents and early life had been of the vilest character, and her public life signalized by cruelty, avarice, and excess. From the date of the publication of this *chronique scandaleuse,* and thanks to Gibbon's trenchant paraphrase of its vilest sections, Theodora was condemned. Her name became the connotation for all the depraved vices known in high life. The silence of eleven centuries was overlooked, and the garish picture of the *Secret History* has formed the modern world's estimate of Rome's most illustrious empress.

It becomes, therefore, an important problem to attempt to distinguish the Theodora of history from the Theodora of romance. We must inquire whether the startling "anecdotes" of the *Secret History* justly supersede the estimate and tradition of so long a period. Was Theodora the grand courtesan she is represented to be in the modern drama, or was she a great empress, worthy of the respect and admiration of Justinian and of succeeding ages? To answer these questions we must first briefly review the legendary history of Theodora, and then dwell more at

length on the authentic history of the empress. This will merit a recital, for she appears to be a personality singularly original and powerful, possessing both the qualities of a statesman and the unique traits of a woman, a character of much complexity and of rare psychological interest.

During the first years of the sixth century there lived in Constantinople a poor man, by name Acacius, a native of the isle of Cyprus, who had the care of the wild beasts maintained by the green faction of the city, and who, from his employment, was entitled the Master of the Bears. This Acacius was the father of Theodora. Upon his death, he left to the tender mercies of the world a widow and three helpless orphans, Comito, Theodora, and Anastasia, the eldest being not yet seven years of age. At a solemn festival these three children were sent by their destitute mother into the theatre, dressed in the garb of suppliants. The green faction scorned them; but the blues had compassion and relieved their distress, and this difference of treatment made a profound impression on the child Theodora, which had its influence on her later conduct. As the maidens increased in age and improved in beauty, they were trained by their mother for a theatrical career. Theodora first followed Comito on the stage, playing the rôle of chambermaid, but at length she exercised her talents independently. She became neither a singer nor a dancer nor a flute player, but she figured in the *tableaux vivants,* where her beauty freely displayed itself, and in the pantomimes, where her vivacity and grace and sprightliness caused the whole theatre to resound with laughter and applause. She was, if the panegyrists may be believed, the most beautiful woman of her age. Procopius, the best historian of the day, says that "it was impossible for mere man to describe her comeliness in words or to imitate it in art." "Her features were delicate and

regular; her complexion, though somewhat pale, was tinged with a natural colour; every sensation was instantly expressed by the vivacity of her eyes; her easy motions displayed the graces of a small but elegant figure; and either love or adulation might proclaim that painting and poetry were incapable of delineating the matchless excellence of her form." It is unfortunate that we have no likeness which portrays her exquisite beauty. The famous mosaic in San Vitale at Ravenna is the best authentic representation of the empress, but a mosaic can give but little idea of the original.

But Theodora possessed other fascinations besides beauty: she was intelligent, full of *esprit,* witty. However, with all these gifts there was in her a deficiency of the moral sense and a natural inclination to pleasure in all its forms. Sad to relate, her charms were venal. If the *Secret History* be believed, her adventures were both numerous and scandalous; to quote a piquant expression of Gibbon, "her charity was universal." Procopius recounts memorable after-theatre suppers and *tableaux vivants* that would be excluded from the most licentious of modern stages. After a wild career in the capital as the reigning figure of the demi-monde, Theodora suddenly disappeared. She condescended to accompany to his province a certain Ecebolus, who had been appointed governor of the African Pentapolis. But this union was transient. She either abandoned her lover or was deserted by him, and for some time the fair Cyprian, a veritable priestess of the divine Aphrodite, made conquests innumerable in all the great cities of the Orient. Finally, she returned to Constantinople, to the scenes of her first exploits, being then between twenty and twenty-five years of age. In her bitterest humiliation, some vision had whispered to her that she was destined to a great career.

Wearied of amorous adventures and of a wandering career, she began from this moment to adopt a retired and blameless life in a modest mansion, where she relieved her poverty by the feminine task of spinning wool. It was at this moment that happy chance threw the patrician Justinian in her path. Captivated by her beauty and her feminine graces, this staid, business-like, and eminently practical personage, already marked as his uncle Justin's successor to the Empire, wished to make the fair Theodora his wife. But there were obstacles in the way. The Empress Euphemia flatly refused to accept the reformed courtesan as a niece; Justinian's own mother, Vigilantia, feared that the vivacious and beautiful worldling would corrupt her son. It was even said that at this time the laws of Rome prohibited the marriage of a senator with a woman of servile origin or of the theatrical profession. But Justinian remained inflexible. The Empress Euphemia conveniently died; Justinian overrode the opposition of his mother; and Justin was persuaded to pass a law abolishing the rigid statute of antiquity and to make Theodora a patrician.

Soon followed the solemn nuptials of Justinian and Theodora; and when, in 527, Justinian was officially associated with his uncle on the throne, Theodora was also solemnly crowned in Saint Sophia by the hands of the Patriarch as an equal and independent colleague in the sovereignty of the Empire, and the oath of allegiance was imposed on bishops and officials in the joint names of Justinian and Theodora; while in the Hippodrome, the scene of her earlier triumphs, the daughter of Acacius received as empress the adulation of the populace.

Such, according to the *Secret History*, is the romance of Theodora. The reason why it has been given general credence is because the work purported to be that of a

contemporary writer, the greatest historian of his age, who has weighted his charges with emphasis and detail, and because the recital received the convincing endorsement of Alemannus and of Gibbon. The principle which governed Gibbon was as follows: "Of these strange anecdotes a part may be true because probable, and a part true because improbable. Procopius must have known the former and the latter he could scarcely invent." Reassured by this argument, and seduced by the masculine taste for adventure, most historians have complacently accepted this piquant history and have applied to Theodora the vilest epithets. But recent writers, especially Debidour, Ranke, Mallet, Bury, and Diehl, have not regarded the case as proved, and through a careful analysis of the *Secret History* have presented convincing arguments against the reputed authorship of the work and the authenticity of its narrative.

These later writers have called attention to the internal evidence of the improbability of the picture of Theodora. There are in the statements glaring inconsistencies with the other works of Procopius, and inconsistencies within the anecdotes themselves. Many stories told of Justinian are obviously overdrawn and dictated by inventive malice, and these vitiate the entire narrative. Furthermore, the question of the marriage law is triumphantly set aside. The edict abolishing the Old Roman law was passed seven years after Justinian's succession, and was in accordance with other legislation inspired by Theodora, to ameliorate the condition of woman. The external evidence, also, has been carefully sifted. The legal maxim, *Testis unus, Testis nullus,* applies in history as well as in law. A single witness has related the most incredible stories. Nowhere in other historians is there a shred of evidence to support the story of Theodora's flagitious life. These stories could

have no basis other than in popular rumors; how is it, therefore, that no other chronicle alludes to them? Orthodox ecclesiastics violently attack Theodora's heresy, and speak of her as an enemy of the Church, but write not a word against her private reputation. Historians condemn in unmeasured terms certain features of Justinian's administration, and dwell on other faults of Theodora, but say never a word about her profligacy. Why are all other writers silent about the dark passages in Theodora's history? Even the *Secret History* alleges nothing immoral against her after her marriage: why then should we take its testimony seriously regarding the earlier period of her life? The silence of all other chronicles about extraordinary occurrences, which, if true, must have been generally known, throws doubt over the whole narrative and places it in the light of an infamous libel.

And here is a final argument. Justinian was no mere youth when he married, but a sober gentleman of thirty-five, the heir apparent to the throne, who had to keep in the good graces of the people. Would he at so momentous a time have perpetrated so infamous a scandal? And would it have been possible for a woman of such notorious profligacy to ascend the throne without a protest from patriarch or bishop or senators or populace? The outward life of the Byzantine people, owing to the influence of Christianity, was usually correct. A little later an emperor lost his throne because he divorced one wife and took another. Theodora's triumphant ascent to the throne, without a protesting voice, is conclusive evidence that no great scandal had sullied her reputation.

Yet, on the other hand, panegyrists never lauded Theodora as a saint. She was neither a Pulcheria nor a Eudocia. Many traits in the character of the empress accord well with the fact that her early life was not passed amid

beds of roses nor had been altogether free from temptation. Hence, with the story reduced to its lowest terms, it seems probable that Theodora was of obscure and lowly origin, that she was for a time connected in some way with the Byzantine stage, and that, owing to her beauty, her cleverness, and her strong personality, she was raised from poverty to share Justinian's throne. But, whatever her career, her life had been sufficiently upright to save appearances, and Justinian could make her his wife without scandal.

The turn of fortune which elevated Theodora from modest station to the imperial throne deeply stirred the popular imagination, and a cycle of legends has gathered about her name. The stranger in Byzantium in the eleventh century was shown the site of a modest cottage, transformed into a stately church dedicated to the spirit of charity, and was told the story how the great empress, coming with her parents from their native town in Cyprus, had here maintained herself in honorable poverty by spinning wool, and how it was here that the patrician Justinian, drawn thither by the fame of her beauty and her learning, had wooed and won her for his bride. However little value we may attach to this tradition, it shows that in Constantinople the popular estimate of Theodora was not that of the *Secret History*. The Slavic traditions of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries not only dwell on her marvellous beauty, but also recount that she was the most queenly, the most cultivated, the most learned of women. The Syriac traditions were still more flattering. In their devout reverence for the pious empress who espoused their cause, these Monophysites of the thirteenth century name as the father of Theodora, not the poor man who guarded the bears in the Hippodrome, but a pious old gentleman, perhaps a senator, attached to the Monophysite

heresy, and affirm that when Justinian, fascinated by the beauty and intelligence of the young maiden, demanded her hand in marriage, the good father did not consent that she should marry the heir apparent until the latter had promised not to interfere with her religious beliefs.

A western chronicler, however, of the eleventh century, Aimoin de Fleury, recounts a legend which has something of the flavor of the *Secret History*. According to this story, Justinian and Belisarius, two young men and intimate friends, encountered one day two sisters, Antonia and Antonina, sprung from the race of Amazons, who, taken prisoners by the Byzantines, were reduced to dire straits. Belisarius was enamored of the latter, Justinian of the former. Antonia, presaging the future destiny of her lover, made him promise that, if ever he became emperor, he would take her as his wife. Their relations were interrupted, but not before Justinian gave to Antonia a ring, as an assurance of his promise. Years passed: the prince became emperor; and one day there appeared at the gate of the palace, demanding audience, a woman in rich attire and of wonderful beauty. Presented before the sovereign, Antonia was not at first recognized; but she showed the ring and recalled his promise, and Justinian, his love for her renewed, proclaimed straightway the beautiful Amazon as his empress. The people and the senate expressed some surprise at the impromptu marriage, but Antonia shared without protest the throne of Justinian.

Thus the marvellous destiny of Theodora was embellished by legend and romance, and, whether good or bad, severely correct or profligate, she has become one of the most remarkable figures of history and fiction.

Questions as to the early life of Theodora, however, are secondary in importance. We are interested not in the courtesan but in the empress, and, for the incidents

and the influence of her reign, we have fortunately other information than that of the *Secret History*.

Sardou's drama *Theodora* represents its heroine as preserving on the throne the manners of the courtesan, as delighting in the life of the theatre, as leaving the palace by night to frequent the streets of Constantinople, as having an amorous intrigue with the beautiful Andreas, as being in fact another, but baser and more voluptuous, Messalina. But even the *Secret History* represents Theodora, after she mounted the throne, as being, with all her faults, the most austere, the most correct, the most irreproachable of women in her conjugal relations.

Whatever her origin and her early life, Theodora adapted herself most readily to the status and the duties of an imperial sovereign. She loved and partook fully of the amenities which attended supreme authority. In her apartments of the royal palace, and in her sumptuous villas and gardens on the Propontis and the Bosporus, she availed herself of all the luxuries and refinements of the royal station. Ever womanly and vain of her physical charms, she took extreme care of her beauty. To make her countenance reposeful and delicate, she prolonged her slumbers until late in the morning; to give her figure sprightliness and grace, she took frequent baths, to which succeeded long hours of repose. Not content with the meagre fare which satisfied Justinian, her table was always supplied with the best of Oriental dishes, which were served with exquisite and delicate taste. Every wish was immediately gratified by her favorite ladies and eunuchs. Like a true parvenue, she delighted in the elaborate court etiquette. She made the highest dignitaries prostrate themselves before her, imposing on those who wished audience long and humiliating delays. Every morning one could see the most illustrious personages of Byzantium

crowded in her antechamber like a troop of slaves, and, when they were admitted to kiss the feet of Theodora, their reception depended altogether upon the humor of the moment. These details show with what facility, with what complaisance, Theodora adapted herself to the conditions of her rank.

One must not infer, however, that the Theodora of history was a woman merely captivated by the outward pomp of royalty. She possessed all the intellectual and moral gifts which should attend absolute power, and her rigid enforcement of Oriental etiquette was merely to impress upon others her supreme authority, and was in conformity to the demand of her age. Her salient characteristics were a spirit despotic and inflexible, a will strong and passionate, an intelligence clever and subtle, a temperament by turns frigid and sympathetic; and by these gifts she dominated Justinian without intermission from the moment of her marriage to her death, and impressed upon all those about her the knowledge that she was in every sense an absolute sovereign.

Furthermore, she possessed a calm courage, a masculine inflexibility, which showed itself in the most difficult circumstances. One can never forget the most ominous moment in the history of the Eastern Empire, when the courage and firmness of Theodora saved the throne of Justinian. This was during the celebrated revolt of 532, known as "The Nika Riot." The factions of the "Blues" and the "Greens" were really the political parties of the day; irritated to madness by the oppression of certain officials, they momentarily united their forces and raised an insurrection against the government, choosing *Nika* (Conquer!) as their watchword, which has become the technical designation of the riot. During five days, the city was a scene of conflict and witnessed all the horrors

of street warfare. Justinian yielded so far as to depose the obnoxious officials, but the secret machinations of the "Green" faction, who wished to place on the throne a nephew of Anastasius, a former emperor, kept up the conflict. On the fateful morning of the 19th of January, Hypatius, one of the nephews of Anastasius, was publicly crowned in the Forum of Constantinople, and was then seated in the *cathisma* of the Hippodrome, where the rebels and the populace saluted him as emperor. Meanwhile, Justinian shut himself up in the palace with his ministers and his favorites. Much of the city was in flames, the tumult outside grew ever louder, and the rebels were preparing for an attack on the palace. All seemed lost. The clamor of victory and the cries of "Death to Justinian," reached the hall where the emperor, utterly unnerved, was taking counsel of his ministers and generals. The prefect John of Cappadocia and the general Belisarius recommended flight to Heraclea. In haste, by the gardens which led to the sea, vessels were loaded with the imperial treasures, and all was ready for the instant flight of the emperor and empress. This was the decisive moment. Flight meant the safety of their persons, but the abandoned throne was surely lost, and the gigantic movements that had been started would collapse. The prince was hesitating, and all his counsellors shared his feebleness. Up to this time, the empress had said nothing. At length, indignant at the general languor, Theodora thus called to their duty the emperor and the ministers who would forsake all for personal safety:

"The present occasion is, I think, too grave to take regard of the principle that it is not meet for a woman to speak among men. Those whose dearest interests are in the presence of extreme danger are justified in thinking only of the wisest course of action. Now, in my opinion,

Nature is an unprofitable tutor, even if her guidance bring us safety. It is impossible for a man when he has come into the world not to die; but for one who has reigned it is intolerable to be an exile. May I never exist without this purple robe, and may I never live to see the day on which those who meet me shall not address me as Queen. If you wish, O Emperor, to save yourself, there is no difficulty; we have ample funds. Yonder is the sea, and there are the ships. Yet reflect whether, when you have once escaped to a place of security, you will not prefer death to safety. I agree with an old saying that 'Empire is a fair winding-sheet.'"

By these courageous words the resolution of Theodora saved the throne of Justinian. Her firmness conquered the weakness and the pusillanimity of the court. Belisarius triumphantly led his forces against the revolutionists in the Hippodrome. A ruthless massacre followed, in which thirty-five thousand persons perished. The power of the factions was forever broken, and henceforth Justinian enjoyed absolute sovereignty without a protest. The important public buildings which had been destroyed in the conflagrations incident to the riot were restored on a more magnificent scale, and the still standing Saint Sophia is a monument to the genius and splendor of the reign of Justinian and Theodora.

One can readily understand what a dominating influence such a woman would maintain over the indecisive Justinian. The passion with which she had inspired the prince was preserved up to the last moment of her life; and his devotion and regard ever increased and after her death took the form of reverential awe, so influenced was he by her superior abilities. She was to him, in the words of a contemporary historian, "the sweetest charm"; or, as he himself says in a legal enactment, "the gift of God"—a

play upon her name. After her death, when he would make a solemn promise, he swore by the name of Theodora. He withheld from her none of the emoluments, none of the realities, of joint and equal sovereignty: her name figured with his in the inscriptions placed upon the façades of churches or the gates of citadels; her image was associated with his in the decorations of the royal palace, as in the mosaics of San Vitale. Her name appeared by the side of his on the imperial seal. A multitude of cities and a newly created province bore her name. In every regard she shared the sovereignty with the emperor. Magistrates, bishops, generals, governors of provinces, swore by all that was sacred to render good and true service to the very pious and sacred sovereigns, Justinian and Theodora.

When Theodora journeyed, a royal cortége accompanied her, consisting of patricians, high dignitaries, and ministers, and an escort of four thousand soldiers as guard. Her orders were received with deference throughout the Empire; and when officials found them in contradiction with those of the emperor, they often preferred the instructions of Theodora to those of Justinian. Functionaries knew that her patronage assured a rapid promotion in royal power and that her good will was a guarantee against possible disgrace. Royal strangers sought to flatter her vanity and to win her good graces.

All the chroniclers record that in state papers on important affairs Theodora was the collaborator with Justinian. The emperor gladly acknowledged his indebtedness to her, and we read in one of his ordinances: "Having this time again taken counsel of the most sacred spouse whom God has given us. . . ." Theodora likewise on occasion gave evidence of her authority. She once ordered Theodatus to submit to her the requests he wished to address to the emperor, and in a communication to the ministers

of the Persian king, Chosroes, she stated: "The emperor never decides anything without consulting me." She was the regulating power in both State and Church, appointing or disgracing generals and ministers, making or unmaking patriarchs and pontiffs, raising to fortune her favorites, and unsettling the power and position of her opponents.

Theodora's comprehension of the necessities of imperial politics was something marvellous, and the wise moves of Justinian were due largely to her counsel. Yet, though so superb a queen, she was all the more a woman—fickle, passionate, avaricious of authority, and intensely jealous of preserving the power she had. Apparently without scruples, she would get rid of all influence which threatened to counterbalance her own, and she brushed aside without pity all opposition which seemed to infringe on her authority. In the intrigues of the palace she ever came off the victor. Vainly did favorites and ministers who fancied themselves indispensable attempt to ruin her credit with the emperor. The secretary Priscus, whom the favor of Justinian had raised to office as count of the bedchamber, paid dearly for the insults which he addressed to Theodora. He was exiled, imprisoned, and finally driven to take orders, and his enormous fortune was confiscated.

The history of John of Cappadocia is more significant still; at the same time that it gives insight into the intrigues and plots of the Byzantine courts, it throws a glowing light on the ambitious nature, the unscrupulous energy, the vindictive spirit, and the perfidious cleverness of the Empress Theodora.

For six years John of Cappadocia occupied the exalted position of prætorian prefect, which made him at the same time minister of finance and minister of the interior, as well as the first minister of the Empire. By his vices, his harshness, and his corruption he justified the proverb:

"The Cappadocian is bad by nature; if he attains to power he is worse; but if he seeks to be supreme, he is the most detestable of all." But in the eyes of Justinian he had one redeeming virtue: he furnished to every request of the prince the funds which the vast expenditures of his reign demanded. At the price of what exactions, of what sufferings of his subjects, he obtained these admirable results, the emperor did not inquire, or perhaps he ignored these considerations. At all events, the prefect was a great favorite of the prince, and the court aides envied the success of his administration. Having a dominating influence over the emperor, possessing riches beyond the dreams of avarice, John attained to the very apex of fortune. Superstitious by nature, the promises of wizards had aroused in him the hope of attaining to the supreme power, as the colleague or successor of Justinian. As a step toward this he attempted to ruin the credit of Theodora with the emperor. This was an offence which the haughty empress could not pardon. The prefect was not ignorant how powerful an adversary he had aroused; but, conscious of his influence with the emperor and of the state of the finances which he alone could administer, he regarded himself as indispensable. But he did not correctly gauge the subtlety of Theodora. She first endeavored to convince the emperor of the sufferings which the prefect inflicted on his subjects and then to arouse his suspicions as to the dangers with which the throne was menaced by the ambition of John: but the emperor, like all feeble natures, hesitated to separate from himself a counsellor to whom by long habit and association he had become attached. Then Theodora conceived a Machiavelian plot.

Theodora's most intimate friend was Antonina, the wife of Belisarius, whom Procopius describes as a woman

"more capable than anyone else to manage the impracticable." The two clever women devised an unscrupulous bit of strategy which, if successful, would surely cause the downfall of the much execrated minister of finance. Antonina, at Theodora's suggestion, cultivated the friendship of John's daughter, Euphemia, and intimated to her that her husband Belisarius was seriously disaffected toward the emperor, because of the poor requital which his distinguished services had received, but that he could not attempt to throw off the imperial yoke unless he was assured of the sympathy and support of some one of the important civil officials. Euphemia naturally told the news to her father, who, seeing in the circumstance an opportunity to ascend the throne with the aid of the powerful general, easily fell into the trap. To perfect the plot the Cappadocian arranged a secret interview at Rufinianum, one of the country seats of Belisarius. The empress arranged to have two faithful officials, Marcellus and Narses, concealed in the villa, with orders to arrest John if his treason became manifest, and, if he resisted, straightway to put him to death. They overheard the treasonable plot, but the minister succeeded in escaping arrest and fled to the inviolable asylum of Saint Sophia. He was, however, exiled in disgrace to Cyzicus; but the ruthless hatred of Theodora followed him, and, after all his ill-gotten gains had been confiscated, he was exiled to Egypt, where he remained until the death of the empress. He finally returned to Constantinople, but Justinian had no further need of the services of his quondam counsellor, and the latter, in the rude garb of a priest, died upon the scene of his former triumphs.

In her ruthless persecution of her opponents, as illustrated by this incident, there seems to have been in this remarkable woman a singular absence of the moral sense.

True it is that she passionately loved power and luxury and wealth; true, that she exercised her authority at times in a ruthless and unscrupulous manner. Yet the hardness of her nature is offset by many sympathetic qualities which show that, together with the sternness of an empress, she had the heart of a woman.

She showed a sympathetic interest in the welfare of her own family. She married her sister Comito to Sittas, an officer of high rank. Her niece Sophia was united in marriage with the nephew of Justin, heir presumptive to the Empire. All her life she regretted that she did not have a son to mount the throne: she had buried an infant daughter, the sole offspring of her marriage.

One of the most pleasing traits of her character was the large tolerance and substantial sympathy she showed to fallen women. Severe on men, she manifested for women a solicitude rarely equalled. On the Asiatic coast of the Bosporus she converted a palace into a spacious and stately monastery, known as the Convent of the Metanoia, or Repentance, and richly endowed it for the benefit of her less fortunate sisters who had been seduced or compelled to embrace the trade of prostitution. In this safe and holy retreat were gathered hundreds of women, collected from the streets and brothels of Constantinople; and many a hapless woman was filled with gratitude toward the generous benefactress who had rescued her from a life of sin and misery.

Are we to see in this tender solicitude an exemplification of the words of the poet, *Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco,* or were her endeavors merely the outcome of the religious exaltation of a pure and noble woman "naturally prone to succor women in misfortune," as a Byzantine writer says of her? At any rate, this practical sympathy exerted its influence also in enactments of the Justinian

Code relating to women; such as the ordinance tending to increase the dignity of marriage and render it more indissoluble, or that to give to seduced maidens recourse against their seducers, or that to relieve actresses of the social disbarment which attended their calling. All these measures were doubtless due to the inspiration of Theodora.

She also carried her strict ideas as to the sanctity of marriage into the life of the court, as is shown by the manner in which she pitilessly spoiled the romance which would have united one of the most brilliant generals of the Empire to a niece of Justinian.

Præjecta, the emperor's niece, had fallen into the hands of Gontharis, a usurper who had slain her husband, Areobindus. She had given up all as lost when an unexpected savior appeared in the person of a handsome Armenian officer, Artabanes, the commander in Africa, who overthrew the usurper and restored her to liberty. From gratitude, Præjecta could refuse her deliverer nothing, and she promised him her hand. The ambitious Armenian saw in this brilliant marriage rapid promotion to the height of power. The princess returned to Constantinople, and the Count of Africa hastened to surrender his honorable office and sought a recall to Constantinople to join his prospective bride. He was lionized in the capital; his dignified demeanor, his burning eloquence and his unbounded generosity won the admiration of all. To remove the social distance between him and his fiancée he was loaded down with honors and dignities. All went well until an unexpected and troublesome obstacle to the nuptials presented itself. Artabanes had overlooked or forgotten the fact that years before he had espoused an Armenian lady. They had been separated a long time, and the warrior had never been heard to speak of her. So long as he was an obscure soldier his wife was contented to leave him in

peace; but not so after his unexpected rise to fame. Suddenly she appeared in Constantinople, claiming the rights of a lawful spouse, and as a wronged woman she implored the sympathetic aid of Theodora.

The empress was inflexible when the sacred bonds of marriage were at stake, and she forced the reluctant general to renounce all claims to the princess and to take back his forsaken wife. By way of precaution, she speedily married Præjecta to John, the grandson of the emperor Anastasius, and the pretty romance was at an end.

With equal regard to the sanctity of marriage, Theodora employed numerous devices to reconcile Belisarius, the celebrated general, with his wife Antonina, to whom the scandal of the *Secret History* attributes serious lapses from moral rectitude, though the charge cannot be regarded as proved.

A portrait of the Byzantine empress would be incomplete if it did not speak of her religious sentiments and the prominent part she took in ecclesiastical politics. In religious matters we see not only the best side of Theodora's nature, but also the supreme exhibition of her influence in the affairs of the Empire. Like all the Byzantines of her time, she was pious and devoted in her manner of life. She was noted for her almsgiving and her contributions to the foundations established by the Church. Chroniclers cite the houses of refuge, the orphanages, and the hospitals founded by her; and Justinian, in one of his ordinances, speaks of the innumerable gifts which she made to churches, hospitals, asylums, and bishoprics.

Yet, in spite of these many exhibitions of inward piety, Theodora was strongly suspected by the orthodox of heresy. She professed openly the monophysite doctrine,—the belief in the one nature in the person of Jesus Christ. She also endeavored to bring Justinian to her view, and,

with an eye to the interest of the state, she entered upon a course of policy which reconciled the schismatics—but disgusted the orthodox Catholics, who were in unison with Rome. The people of Syria and Egypt were almost universally Monophysites and Separatists. Theodora, with a political finesse far greater than that of her husband, saw that the discontent in the Orient was prejudicial to the imperial power, and she endeavored by her line of policy to reconcile the hostile parties and to reëstablish religious peace in the Empire. She recognized that the centre of gravity of the government had passed permanently from Rome to Constantinople, and that consequently the best policy was to keep at peace the peoples of the East.

Justinian, on the other hand, misled by the grandeur of Roman tradition, wished to establish, through union with the Roman See, strict orthodoxy in the restored empire of the Cæsars. Theodora, with greater acumen, observed the irreconcilable lines of difference between East and West, and recognized that to proscribe the learned and powerful party of dissenters in the Orient would alienate important provinces and be fatal to the authority of the monarchy. She therefore threw her influence into the balance of heresy. She received the leaders of the Monophysites in the palace, and listened sympathetically to their counsels, their complaints, their remonstrances. She placed men of this faith in the most prominent patriarchal sees—Severius at Antioch, Theodosius at Alexandria, Anthimius at Constantinople. She transformed the palace on Hormisdas into a monastery for the persecuted priests of Syria and Asia. When Severius was subjected to persecution, she provided means for him to escape from Constantinople; and when Anthimius was deposed from the metropolitan see, she extended to him, in spite of imperial orders, her open protection, aud gave him an asylum in

the palace. Her boldest *coup*, however, consisted in placing on the pontifical seat at Rome a pope of her own choice, pledged to act with the Monophysites.

For this rôle she found the man in the Roman deacon Vigilius, for some years apostolic legate at Constantinople. Vigilius was an ambitious and clever priest who had won his way into the confidence of Theodora, and the empress thought to find in him, when elevated to the pontifical chair, a ready instrument for her purposes. It is recounted that, in exchange for the imperial protection and patronage, Vigilius engaged to reëstablish Anthimius at Constantinople, to enter into a league with Theodosius and Severius, and to annul the Council of Chalcedon. Upon the death of the presiding pope, Agapetus, Vigilius set out for Rome with letters for Belisarius, who was then at the height of his power in Italy, and these letters were such that they did not admit of objection. Apparently, in this affair Justinian had secretly assented to the plans of the empress, seeing perhaps in the movement a solution which would bring about the unity which he desired and place the Roman pontiff in accord with the Orientals. But it was not without trouble that Vigilius was installed. Immediately upon the death of Agapetus, the Roman party had provided a successor in Silverius; and to seat Vigilius in the chair of Saint Peter, they must first make Silverius descend. Belisarius was charged with this repugnant task. With manifest reluctance, he undertook his part in the questionable intrigue. He first suggested to Silverius a dignified way of settling the affair by making the concessions which the emperor desired of Vigilius. Silverius indignantly refused to make any such compromise. Thereupon, under the imaginary pretext of treason, he was brutally arrested, deposed, and sent into exile. Vigilius was at once ordained pope in his stead. Theodora seemed to have conquered.

But when securely installed, Vigilius, in spite of the threats of Belisarius, deferred the fulfilment of his promises. Finally, however, he was compelled to make important concessions to the empress. This was the last triumph of Theodora; and toward the close of her life, in the growing progress of the Eastern Church, and in the declining influence of the pope, she had reason to believe that the dreams of her religious diplomacy were realized.

Theodora's advocacy of the cause of the dissenters accounts for much of the vituperation heaped upon her by orthodox Catholics. In the eyes of the Cardinal Baronius, the wife of Justinian was "a detestable creature, a second Eve too ready to listen to the serpent, a new Delilah, another Herodias, revelling in the blood of the saints, a citizen of Hell, protected by demons, inspired by Satan, burning to break the concord bought by the blood of confessors and of martyrs." It is worthy of note that this was written before the discovery of the manuscript of the *Secret History*. What would the learned cardinal have said had he known of the alleged adventures of the youth of this woman, classed by pious Catholics as one of the worst enemies of the Church?

Perhaps, after all, we are to find in Theodora's religious defection the source of all the scandal which has attached to her name. Damned in the eyes of pious churchmen because of her religious faith that Christ's nature was not dual, it was easy for the tongue of scandal regarding her early life to gain credence. Had Theodora followed the orthodox in the belief in the two natures, she might have committed worse offences than were charged to her, and no such vituperation would have been uttered by any member of the orthodox Church; but her position in the religious controversies of the sixth century will certainly, in the twentieth century, do her memory little harm.

Theodora's health was always delicate. After these years of stormy dissension, as her strength began to fail, she was directed to use the famous Pythian warm baths. Her progress through Bithynia was made with all the splendor of an imperial cortége, and all along the route she distributed alms to churches, monasteries, and hospitals, with the request that the devout should implore Heaven for the restoration of her health. Finally, in the month of June, A. D. 548, in the twenty-fourth year of her marriage and the twenty-second of her reign, Theodora died of a cancer. Justinian was inconsolable at her loss, which rightly seemed to him to be irreparable. His later years were lacking in the energy and finesse that had characterized him during her lifetime, and it was doubtless her loss which clouded his spirits and removed from him the chief inspiration of his reign. Some years after Theodora's death, a poet, desiring to gratify the emperor, recalled the memory of the excellent, beautiful and wise sovereign, "who was beseeching at the throne of grace God's favor on her spouse."

We can hardly think of Theodora as a glorified saint, yet her goodness of heart and her charity may atone for many of the serious defects in her character. We know not whence she came nor the story of her early life; but as an empress she exhibited all the defects of her qualities. She was a woman cast in a large mould, and her faults stand out in equal prominence with her virtues. She was at times cruel, selfish, and proud, often despotic and violent, utterly unscrupulous and pitiless when it was a question of maintaining her power. But she was resourceful, resolute, energetic, courageous; her political acumen was truly masculine; in a critical moment she saved the throne for Justinian, and during all her lifetime she was his wise Egeria, by her counsel enabling him to succeed in

great movements; when her influence ceased to exercise itself a decadence began which continued during the remaining years of Justinian's reign.

As a woman, she was capricious, passionate, vain, self-willed, but sympathetic to the unfortunate and infinitely seductive. Truly imperial was she in her vices, truly queenly in her virtues. Whatever may have been her youth, her career on the throne is the best refutation of the scandal of the *Secret History*, and she deserves a place in the records of history as one of the world's greatest, most intelligent, most fascinating empresses.

Chapter XII

Other Self-asserting Augustæ

Verina, Ariadne, Sophia, Martina, Irene

XII

OTHER SELF-ASSERTING AUGUSTÆ

VERINA, ARIADNE, SOPHIA, MARTINA, IRENE

It is a noteworthy feature in the history of the Eastern Roman Empire that periods in which empresses figure prominently in the affairs of state alternate with periods in which the Augustæ are mere ciphers. Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius, marks the early limit of feminine predominance in the independent history of the eastern section of the Roman Empire. The Empress Irene, who reigned at first with her son Constantine and afterward alone, marks the later limit of the Roman, as distinguished from the strictly Byzantine Empire, since during her reign, at the beginning of the ninth century, the Empire of the West was completely dissevered from all connection with Constantinople through the crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor of the West by Pope Leo. Thus a masterful woman was the predominating influence at the beginning and at the end of the existence of the Eastern Roman Empire as a separate entity.

In the interval between these two limits the most important reign was that of Justinian and the most remarkable woman was, of course, the Empress Theodora. Following Eudoxia were the rival Empresses Pulcheria and Eudocia, celebrated for their beauty, their culture, and their piety.

When the house of Theodosius ceased to exist with Pulcheria and Marcian, the Roman Empire in the East was safely guided through the stormy times which saw its extinction in the West by a series of three men of ability, Leo I. (457–474), Zeno (474–491), and Anastasius (491–518). During this period two Augustæ—Verina and Ariadne—took a part in imperial politics, and made up in wickedness and intrigue what they lacked in culture and piety. Next followed the house of Justin, which produced two remarkable women in Theodora and her niece Sophia, the latter, though not the equal of her aunt in strength of character, yet leaving her mark on the history of her times.

Following the death of Sophia there was for nearly forty years a break in the predominance of self-asserting Augustæ. Of the wives of Tiberius, Maurice, and Phocas, we know merely the names—respectively, Anastasia, Constantina, and Leontia Augusta. Heraclius's memorable reign was shared with two empresses, the first of whom, Eudocia, did nothing to win publicity, while the career of the second—Martina—recalls the wickedness and the intrigue of Verina and Sophia. But the spouses of the successors of Heraclius did not follow Martina's ignoble example, but were women of whom nothing was recorded either of praise or blame. We do not even know the name of the wife of Constans II., who entered upon a long reign after the exile of Heracleonas, son of Martina. Anastasia, the spouse of Constantine IV., Theodora, queen of the second Justinian, Maria, spouse of Leo III., the Isaurian, and Irene, Maria, and Eudocia, the three wives of Constantine V., played so little part in political affairs that they are hardly better known than the nameless wives of the emperors who filled up the interval between the second Justinian and Leo the Isaurian (695–716).

This brief résumé brings us to the reign of the Empress Irene, who in energy, in wickedness, and in ambition made up for all the deficiencies of her predecessors. Having devoted separate chapters to the most celebrated Augustæ of the Eastern Empire—Eudoxia, Pulcheria and Eudocia, and Theodora—we shall group into one chapter our brief consideration of the lives and characters of the less renowned but no less pronounced Augustæ of the intervening periods—Verina, Ariadne, Sophia, Martina, and Irene.

Verina and her daughter Ariadne, through their wickedness and ambition, cast dark shadows over the otherwise bright history of the house of Leo the Great. Verina, the imperial consort of Leo, was a woman of little cultivation but of great natural gifts, fond of intrigue, ambitious of power, and implacable in hatred and revenge. Of her two daughters, Ariadne had married Zeno the Isaurian, one of the most illustrious and able officials of the Empire. Leo, the offspring of this union, was selected as the heir and successor of Leo I., but upon the death of the lad, shortly after his accession, Zeno was raised to the throne, much to the disgust of the empress-mother Verina. She fostered a conspiracy for the downfall of Zeno and the elevation of Patricius, her paramour, and as a result of her intrigues Zeno had to forsake his throne and flee to the mountain fastnesses of Isauria, his native country, together with his wife Ariadne and his mother Lallis. Verina's brother, Basiliscus, aspired to the throne, but she opposed his claims in order to win the purple for Patricius. After Zeno's flight, however, the ministers and senators elected Basiliscus as his successor, and the new emperor entered upon a most unpopular and checkered reign of only twenty months. His queen was named Zenonis, a young and beautiful woman, who soon gained an unenviable reputation because of her manifest fondness for her husband's

nephew Harmatius, a young fop, noted for his good looks and his effeminate manners. An ancient chronicler tells the story of this intrigue:

"Basiliscus permitted Harmatius, inasmuch as he was a kinsman, to associate freely with the empress Zenonis. Their intercourse became intimate, and, as they were both persons of no ordinary beauty, they became extravagantly enamored of each other. They used to exchange glances of the eyes, they used constantly to turn their faces and smile at each other, and the passion which they were obliged to conceal was the cause of grief and vexation. They confided their trouble to Daniel, a eunuch, and to Maria, a midwife, who hardly healed their malady by the remedy of bringing them together. Then Zenonis coaxed Basiliscus to grant her lover the highest office in the city."

This palace intrigue was soon brought to an end, however, by the fall of Basiliscus and the restoration of Zeno in 477, in spite of the intrigues of Verina. After Zeno's return, his most powerful minister, the Isaurian Illus, became the object of Verina's enmity and machinations. She even formed a plot to assassinate him, which he was fortunate enough to discover and frustrate. Recognizing that his power would not be secure so long as Verina was at large, he begged Zeno to consign to him the dangerous woman; and the emperor, doubtless glad to be rid of his redoubtable mother-in-law, gave her over into his hands. Illus first compelled her to take the vows of a nun at Tarsus, and then placed her in confinement in Dalisandon, an Isaurian castle.

But Illus had only got rid of one female foe to find a more bitter antagonist in the latter's daughter, the empress Ariadne. She made the second attempt on his life in 483, and used all her arts of intrigue to estrange from him the Emperor Zeno. Finally, realizing that his life was not

safe in Constantinople, Illus withdrew from the court, and later attached himself to the cause of the rebel Leontius, who sought to overthrow Zeno. In support of the rebel's cause, Illus turned to his quondam enemy Verina, the empress-mother, who from her prison castle was glad to seize the opportunity to deal a blow to her ungrateful son-in-law. To give the semblance of legitimacy to the cause of Leontius, Verina was induced to crown him at Tarsus, and she also issued a letter in his interest, which was sent to various cities and exerted a marked influence on the disaffected. Leontius established an imperial court at Antioch, but was speedily overthrown by Theodoric the Ostrogoth. The two leaders of the conspiracy, with Verina, took refuge in the Isaurian stronghold of Papirius, where they stood a siege for four years, during which time Verina died. The fortress was finally taken through the treachery of Illus's sister-in-law, and Illus and Leontius were slain.

After the death of Zeno, Anastasius was in 491 proclaimed emperor through the influence of the widowed empress Ariadne, who married him about six weeks later and continued to be an influence in politics during Anastasius's long and successful reign.

In Verina and Ariadne we see a mother and a daughter exceedingly alike in character, but frequently at cross purposes with each other because of their similar traits. Both were ambitious, both fond of intrigue, and both ready to commit any crime when it answered their purpose. Verina, pleased at the accession of her grandson Leo, whom she could control, was chagrined and disappointed when upon the lad's death his masterful father was elevated to the throne; and, continuing her intrigues, she lost first her royal station and then her freedom and her life in her endeavor to do an injury to her son-in-law. Ariadne quickly grasped the power which her mother had

lost, and has the unusual record of choosing her husband's successor on the throne and of being the imperial consort of two rulers in succession.

We pass now to the dynasty of Justin and to a consideration of the niece of the great Theodora, Sophia, empress of Justin the Younger, nephew and successor of Justinian.

The poet Corippus gives a dramatic account of the elevation of Justin and Sophia. During Justinian's long illness the two were faithful attendants at his bedside and ministered to his every want. Finally, one morning, before the break of day, Justin was awakened by a patrician and informed that the emperor was dead. Soon after, the members of the Senate entered the palace and assembled in a beautiful room overlooking the sea, where they found Justin conversing with his wife Sophia. They greeted the royal pair as Augustus and Augusta; and the twain, with apparent reluctance, submitted to the will of the Senate. They then repaired to the imperial chamber, and gazed, with tearful eyes, upon the corpse of their beloved uncle. Sophia at once ordered to be brought an embroidered cloth, on which was wrought in gold and brilliant colors the whole series of Justinian's labors, the emperor himself being represented in the midst with his foot resting upon the neck of the Vandal giant. The next morning, Justin and his imperial consort proceeded to the church of Saint Sophia, where they made a public declaration of the orthodox faith.

In taking this step, Sophia showed that she had the ambition but not the political acumen of her aunt Theodora. Like the latter, she had been originally a Monophysite; but a wily bishop had suggested that her heretical opinions stood in the way of her husband's promotion to the rank of Cæsar, and in consequence she found it advisable to join the ranks of the orthodox. Unfortunately, by

this step the balance of the religious parties, which Theodora had so successfully maintained, was broken, and the later years of Justin's reign were disgraced by the persecution of the Monophysites, so that great disaffection toward the throne was created throughout the East.

The religious ceremony was soon followed by the acclamations of the populace in the Hippodrome, which were made all the more hearty through the act of Justin in discharging the vast debts of his uncle Justinian; and, before three years had elapsed, his example was imitated and surpassed by the empress, who delivered many indigent citizens from the weight of debt and usury—an act of benevolence which won for her the gratitude and adoration of the populace.

Thus auspiciously began the reign of Justin and Sophia, which the royal pair had proclaimed was to be an new era of happiness and glory for mankind; but, though the sentiments of the emperor were pure and benevolent and it was the ambition of the empress to surpass her aunt Theodora, neither had the intellectual gifts equal to the task, and during their reign the Empire was subjected to disgrace abroad and to wretchedness at home.

Much the same ingratitude which Belisarius had experienced at the hand of his imperial mistress was visited upon his eminent successor, Narses, by the new empress. She sent Longinus, as the new exarch, to supersede the conqueror of Italy, and in most insulting language recalled the eunuch Narses to Constantinople. "Let him leave to men," she said, "the exercise of arms, and return to his proper station among the maidens of the palace, where a distaff should be again placed in the hands of the eunuch." "I will spin her such a thread as she shall not easily unravel!" is said to have been the indignant reply of the hero, who alone had saved Italy to the Empire. Instead

of returning to the Byzantine palace, he returned to Naples and later dwelt at Rome, where he passed away and with him the only military genius great enough to ward off the invasion of the Lombards.

After a reign of a few years the faculties of Justin, which were impaired by disease, began to fail, and in 574 he became a hopeless lunatic. The only son of the imperial pair had died in infancy, and the question of a successor now became a serious one. The daughter, Arabia, was the wife of Baduarius, superintendent of the palace, who vainly aspired to the honor of adoption as the Cæsar. Domestic animosities turned the empress elsewhere.

The artful empress found a suitable successor in Tiberius, the young and handsome captain of the guards, and, in one of his sane intervals, Justin, at her instance, created him a Cæsar. During the few remaining years of Justin's life, Tiberius showed himself to both his adopted parents a filial and grateful son, and meekly submitted to all the exactions of his empress-mother. Though relying on Tiberius for the sterner duties of the imperial office, Sophia retained all her authority and sovereignty as Augusta and would not submit to the presence of another queen in the palace. Tiberius was already a husband and father. In a sane moment, Justin, with masculine good nature and blindness to feminine foibles, blandly suggested that Ino, the wife of the Cæsar, should dwell with Tiberius in the palace, for, he added, "he is a young man and the flesh is hard to rule." But Sophia immediately put her foot down. "As long as I live," said she, "I will never give my kingdom to another"—words that were possibly a reminiscence of the celebrated saying of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, "I am a queen; and as long as I live I will reign." Consequently, during the lifetime of Justin, Ino and her two daughters lived in complete retirement in a modest

house not far from the palace. Her social status aroused considerable interest among the ladies of the court circle, who found it difficult to decide whether or not they should call on the wife of the Cæsar. At tables and firesides this question was gravely discussed, but no one would take the initiative of visiting Ino without first consulting the wishes of Sophia. Finally, when one of the ladies, with considerable trepidation, ventured to ask the empress, she was scolded for her pains; "Go away and be quiet," responded the imperious Sophia, "it is no business of yours."

When, however, a few days before the death of Justin, Tiberius was inaugurated emperor, he at once installed his wife in the palace, to the chagrin of the empress-mother, and had her recognized by the factions of the Hippodrome. A conflict arose as to what should be her Christian name as empress: the Blues wished to change her pagan name to "Anastasia," while the Greens urged stoutly the adoption of the name of the sainted "Helena." Tiberius decided with the Blues, and as Anastasia Ino was crowned Empress of the East.

During the long apprenticeship of Tiberius, Sophia had held the purse strings and had kept the young Cæsar on an allowance which seemed too small to comport with his imperial prospects. Upon becoming emperor, however, Tiberius quickly rid himself of the dictation of his patroness. He gave her a stately palace in which to live, and surrounded her with a numerous train of eunuchs and courtiers; he paid her ceremonious visits on formal occasions and always saluted the widow of his benefactor with the title of mother. But it was impossible for Sophia to overcome her disappointment at being deprived of power, and she set on foot numerous conspiracies to dethrone Tiberius and to bring about the elevation of some one whom she

could control. The chief of these plots centred about the young Justinian, the son of Germanus of the house of Anastasius. Upon the death of Justin a faction had asserted the claims of Justinian; but Tiberius had freely pardoned the youth for aspiring to the purple and had given him the command of the Eastern army. Sophia seized upon the acclamation which the renown of his victories inspired to start a conspiracy in his interests, but Tiberius heard in time of the intended uprising and by his personal exertions and firmness suppressed the conspiracy. He once more forgave Justinian, but he realized the necessity of restraining the activity of the rapidly aging, but still clever and intriguing, ex-empress. Sophia was deprived of all imperial honors and reduced to a modest station, and the care of her person was committed to a faithful guard who should frustrate any further attempts on her part to play a part in the game of imperial politics. Thus the ambitious niece of Theodora passed off the stage of action after a career which, beginning with every promise of brilliant success and high renown, had, after many vicissitudes, ended in humiliation and disgrace.

Heraclius's long and memorable reign, from 610 to 641, was characterized by much domestic infelicity. Upon the day of his coronation he celebrated his marriage with the delicate Eudocia, who bore him two children, a daughter, Epiphania, and a son, Heraclius Constantine, the natural successor to the throne. Heraclius's second wife was his own niece Martina, the marriage being considered incestuous by the orthodox and becoming the cause of much scandal. The curses of Heaven too seemed to be upon the union; of the children, Flavius had a wry neck and Theodosius was deaf and dumb; the third, Heracleonas, had no pronounced physical deformity, but was lacking in intellectual power and in moral force. The physical

sufferings of Heraclius in his last years were also looked upon as retribution for his sin.

Martina's influence upon her aged husband in his declining years was unbounded. Full of ambition and intrigue, she induced him upon his deathbed to declare her son Heracleonas joint heir with Constantine, hoping thus herself to wield imperial power. "When Martina first appeared on the throne with the name and attributes of royalty, she was checked by a firm, though respectful opposition; and the dying embers of freedom were kindled by the breath of superstitious prejudice. 'We reverence,' exclaimed the voice of a citizen, 'we reverence the mother of our princes; but to those princes alone our obedience is due; and Constantine, the elder emperor, is of an age to sustain in his own hand the weight of the sceptre. Your sex is excluded by nature from the toils of government. How could you combat, how could you answer, the barbarians who, with hostile or friendly intentions, may approach the royal city? May Heaven avert from the Roman Republic this national disgrace which would provoke the patience of the slaves of Persia!' Martina descended from the throne with indignation and sought a refuge in the female apartment of the palace."

But, though deprived of the outward prerogatives of supreme power, she determined all the more to wield the sceptre through the power of her son. The reign of Constantine III. lasted only one hundred and three days, and at the early age of thirty he expired. The belief was prevalent that poison was the means used by his inhuman stepmother to bring him to his untimely end. Martina at once caused her son to proclaim himself sole emperor. But the public abhorrence of the incestuous widow of Heraclius was only increased by this deed, for Constantine had left a son, Constans, the natural heir. Both Senate

and populace rose in indignation, and compelled Heracleonas to comply with their demand that Constans be made his colleague. His submission saved him for only a year. In 642 he was deposed by the Senate, and he and his mother Martina were sent into exile. So violent was the popular rage that the tongue of the mother and the nose of the son were slit—the first instance of the barbarous Oriental custom being applied to members of the royal house.

Martina was always looked upon by the devout of her age as "the accursed thing." She had by intrigue won the hand of her widowed uncle, by intrigue exerted a dominating influence over the emperor even up to his dying moments, and by intrigue tried to determine the destiny of her son and her stepson. But the intriguing widow reaped in public abhorrence the natural results of her offences. For a time the people endured the abomination of her unnatural crimes, but at last they visited upon her a well-merited punishment.

The reign of the empress Irene is noteworthy because of her restoration of the images banished by Leo the Isaurian and his successors, and because it marks the end of all union between the Eastern and Western Empires and the beginning of the Byzantine Empire strictly so called. Hence, it deserves more minute attention than the other reigns we have briefly sketched, and some mention must be made of the history of the religious movement with which Irene's name is so intimately connected.

Leo III., the Isaurian, the most remarkable of the Byzantine emperors since the days of the great Justinian, made his long reign from 717 to 740 memorable by his victories over the Saracens and his long and bitter conflict against the image worship and relic worship which had developed rapidly throughout the Empire and had assumed the aspect of fetichism.

The early Christians, owing to their Jewish proclivities, had felt an unconquerable repugnance to the use of images, and their religious worship was uniformly simple and spiritual. As the Greek influence spread throughout the Church, however, there developed a veneration of the Cross and of the relics of the saints. Then it was thought that if the relics were esteemed, so much the more should be the faithful copies of the persons of the saints, as delineated by the arts of painting and sculpture. In course of time, by a natural development, the honors of the original were transferred to the copy, and the Christian's prayer before the image of the saint ceased to distinguish between the counterfeit presentment and the saint it was designed to portray. As healing power was attributed to many of the images and pictures, the popular adoration of them grew. Thus, by the end of the sixth century the worship of images was firmly established, especially among the Greeks and Asiatics. Many pious souls began to see that this idolatry of the Christians hardly differed from the idolatry of the Greeks, and that they had no potent arguments against the assertions of Jews and Mohammedans that Greek Christianity was but a continuation of Greek paganism. Consequently, a reaction began, which reached its culmination in the reign of Leo the Isaurian, who, because of his active hostility to images, was surnamed Leo the Iconoclast. His measures were severe, and he introduced a movement which involved the East in a tremendous conflict of one hundred and twenty years.

Leo's son, Constantine V.,—Copronymus,—was a more cruel and determined iconoclast than his father; but into his own family circle he was destined to introduce a member who was to set at naught the efforts of father and son and restore the worship of images to its former flourishing estate. Copronymus himself had had three wives, the

most prominent of whom was a barbarian, the daughter of a khan of the Chazars; but for the wife of his son and heir, Leo IV., he selected an Athenian virgin, an orphan of seventeen summers, whose sole endowment consisted in her beauty and her personal charms. As in the case of Athenais, nothing is known of the antecedents of Irene. Who her parents were, what was her education, how many years she lived in her native city—these are questions of idle speculation. Her imperial career shows that she was a woman of remarkable beauty and fascination, of highly trained intellectual gifts and Hellenic temperament, and from this we are led to infer that she had in her youth the best instruction her native city afforded.

The nuptials of Leo and Irene were celebrated with imposing splendor, and the new princess rapidly became an important influence in the life of the palace, winning the regard of her father-in-law and acquiring an indisputable ascendency over her feeble husband. Irene, though a Christian, inherited the idolatry and the love of images and ritual of her ancestors; but during the remaining years of the reign of Copronymus and the four short years in which her husband occupied the throne she repressed her zeal, and by clever dissimulation hid her devotion to the cause of the image worshippers.

Leo left the Empire to his son Constantine VI., a lad of ten years, with the empress-dowager Irene as sole regent and guardian of the Roman world. During the minority of her son Irene discharged with vigor and assiduity all the duties of public administration and enjoyed to the full the irresponsible power of her office of regent. She took advantage of her power to restore the worship of images and thus won the favor of a large faction of the populace and the clergy. She endeavored to bring up her son in such a way that he should continue to be subservient to

her, and as he approached the age at which he should assume the reins of government, Irene showed no disposition to yield up her power.

Even when Constantine became of age, he was excluded from state affairs. He had been betrothed to Rotrud, daughter of Charlemagne; but Irene, for the sake of her own power, had broken off the match and compelled him to marry one of her favorites, who was distasteful to him. The maternal yoke, which he had so patiently borne, finally became grievous, and Constantine listened eagerly to the favorites of his own age who urged him to assert his rights. He was finally persuaded to do so, and succeeded in seizing the helm of state. His mother vigorously resisted, but was overcome and compelled to go into seclusion for a time; but Constantine at length pardoned her and restored her former dignity. Irene, however, had by no means relinquished her ambition for sole power, and availed herself of every opportunity to discredit the prince and enhance her own popularity.

Constantine became enamored of one of his mother's maids of honor, Theodota. With the insidious purpose of making him odious to the clergy, who discountenanced divorce and second marriage, Irene encouraged him to put away his wife, Maria, and marry Theodota. The patriarch Tarasius, a creature of the empress-mother, acquiesced in the emperor's wishes, and, though he would not perform the ceremony himself, he ordered one of his subordinates to celebrate the unpopular bans. The affair created great scandal among the monks and was injurious to the prestige of the emperor.

A powerful conspiracy was secretly organized for the restoration of the empress. At length the emperor, suspecting his danger, escaped from Constantinople with the purpose of arousing the provinces and the armies so that

he might return to the city with sufficient force to overwhelm the conspirators and establish beyond question his power. By this flight the empress was left in danger, because of the possible exposure of the plot and the indignation of the populace. She acted with her customary shrewdness and duplicity. Among those about the emperor were some who were involved in the conspiracy; so, while appearing to be making ready to implore the mercy and beg the return of her son, she sent to these men a secret communication in which she veiled the threat that if they did not act, she would reveal their treason. Fearing for their lives, they acted at once with the boldness of desperate criminals. Seizing the emperor on the Asiatic shore, they conveyed him across the Hellespont to the porphyry apartment of the palace, the chamber in which he was born. The son was now completely in the power of the mother, in whom ambition had stifled every maternal emotion. In the bloody council called by the traitors she urged that Constantine should be rendered incapable of holding the throne. Her emissaries blinded the young prince and immured him in a monastery. As a blind monk Constantine survived five of his successors; but his memory was revived among men only by the marriage of his daughter Euphrosyne with the Emperor Michael the Second.

For five years Irene enjoyed all the delights and experienced all the bitterness of absolute power. Her crime called down upon her the execration of all the best among mankind, but dread of her cruelty prevented any open outbreak against her. She carried on the movement for the restoration of images, and by her outward piety she caused men to overlook the heinous nature of her crimes. Her reign was noted for its external splendor and the strong influence she exerted on all affairs of state. She

offered marriage to the Emperor Charlemagne of the West, but he repelled with repugnance all overtures from the unnatural mother and reminded her that her intrigues had prevented the union of his daughter with the Emperor Constantine. In fact, her accession brought about the final severing of all bonds of union between the eastern and western divisions of the Roman world. Pope Leo regarded a female sovereign as an anomaly and an abomination in the eyes of all true Romans, and he brought to an end all claims the Byzantine dynasty might have on Italy at least, by creating Charlemagne Emperor of the West.

These years of power were troublous ones to the wicked queen, because of rebellions abroad and palace intrigues at home. She had surrounded herself with servile patricians and eunuchs, whom she enriched and elevated to the highest offices of state; but her own example had fostered in them ingratitude and duplicity, and, while they showed her every outward mark of deference, they secretly conspired for her downfall and their own elevation. The grand treasurer, Nicephorus, won over the leading eunuchs and courtiers about the person of the empress, and the decision was reached that he should be invested with the purple. Never was Irene more queenly than in the manner with which she received the intelligence of her fall. When the conspirators informed her that she must retire from the palace, she addressed them with becoming dignity, recounting the revolutions of her life, and accepting with composure her fate. She gently reproached Nicephorus for his perfidy and reminded him that he owed his elevation to her, and she requested the proper recognition of her imperial standing and asked for a safe and honorable retreat. But the greed of Nicephorus would not grant this last request; he deprived her of all her

dignities and wealth, and exiled her to the Isle of Lesbos, where she endured every hardship and gained a scanty subsistence by the labors of her distaff. Irene survived the change of her fortune for only one year, and in 803 died of grief—destitute, forsaken, and lonely.

Because of her wickedness Irene's name is perpetuated in history among the Messalinas and the Lucrezia Borgias. Because of her religious orthodoxy she was canonized as a saint,—a striking instance of how outward conformity to religion covers a multitude of sins.

Chapter XIII

Byzantine Empresses
Theodora II., Theophano, Zoe, Theodora III.

XIII

BYZANTINE EMPRESSES

THEODORA II., THEOPHANO, ZOE, THEODORA III.

THE Iconoclastic controversy was far from being extinguished with the fall (in the person of Irene) of the house of Leo the Isaurian. It was destined to continue for over half a century longer and to be finally settled by another empress whose career bore marked similarity to that of the image-loving Irene; and it then remained settled because the second image-loving queen was succeeded by a royal house sprung from one of the European *themes* which was in sympathy, accordingly, with the Church of the West, rather than with the religious sentiment of the people of the Orient.

But a greater change had come over the Eastern Empire with the exile and death of Irene. Her elevation had, as we have seen, severed the connection between East and West and led to the appointment of a Western emperor in the person of Charlemagne. Hence, from this time onward the interests and sympathies of the two sections of the later Roman Empire diverge more and more, and the government at Constantinople becomes ever more Oriental in its proclivities. It is, therefore, more appropriate to use the adjective Byzantine for the remaining centuries of the history of Constantinople to its conquest by the Turks in 1453.

The careers of Irene and her successor, Theodora, the two image-worshipping empresses, in the contrast of the vicissitudes of their lives with the rapidity of their rise and the splendor of their power, offer materials for romance more truly than for sober history. Each was born in private station; and in each case it must have required rare beauty and fascination and high intellectual gifts to fill so successfully the exalted position of Empress of the Romans, and to overturn the iconoclastic reforms of their predecessors on the throne. Each of them, too, when regent, was grossly neglectful of the son over whose youth she presided, and whom she should have fitted for the high station to which he was destined. Yet herein lies the marked difference between the two queens: Irene finally expelled her son from his royal station, and sent him to pass his life as a blinded monk in a secluded cell; Theodora, finding she could no longer control the wild nature of her son, whose training she had neglected, retired from the court and sought relief in a life of penitence. For their pious acts, both empresses were canonized as orthodox saints, but Irene must ever be regarded as a demon at heart, while Theodora must pass as a misguided and self-deceived woman, who, in the performance of her religious duties, overlooked the most important task just at hand. But we are anticipating our consideration of Theodora, the second Irene.

The iconoclastic controversy was renewed by Nicephorus, who usurped the throne of Irene, as he was of Oriental extraction and therefore in sympathy with the so-called heretics. Neither Nicephorus nor his successor during a period of political anarchy came to a peaceful end, but Michael II., in 829 died a natural death in the royal palace, still wearing the crown he had won, and leaving the throne to his son Theophilus, destined to rank

as the Haroun Al Raschid of Byzantine romance and story. Michael had married Euphrosyne, the daughter of Irene's son, Constantine VI., and the last scion of Leo the Isaurian. Euphrosyne had already taken the veil, but, to bring about a union which might probably continue the line of Leo, the patriarch absolved her from her vows, and she passed from the convent to the palace as Empress of the East. Yet, so far as we know, there was no issue of the marriage, and Michael's son—Theophilus—by a former wife succeeded his father on the throne. Euphrosyne remained for a time in the palace as empress-dowager, and seems to have been on the best of terms with her stepson, whom she at length assisted in the important but difficult task of selecting a consort.

Theophilus, since the time of Constantine VI., was the first prince to be brought up in the purple, and his education was the best the age afforded. The ninth century was an age of romance, both in action and in literature, and Theophilus was inspired with many of the ideas of Oriental monarchs. His reign, therefore, furnishes a series of anecdotes and tales like to those of the *Arabian Nights,* and was surrounded with an Oriental glamour and mystery. And, like his predecessors, he was a pronounced iconoclast.

Theophilus was unmarried when he ascended the throne, and the matter of choosing a wife presented many difficulties to the absolute ruler who could have his choice from among the daughters of the aristocratic families of Constantinople, or even from the provinces of his dominions. He finally took counsel with the attractive empress-dowager Euphrosyne, and between them they devised a plan which would permit of a wide range of choice and yet possess all the romance of mythical times.

The empress-dowager one day assembled at her levée all the most beautiful and accomplished daughters of the

nobles of the capital. While the maidens were engaged in the interchange of friendly greetings, Theophilus suddenly entered the room, carrying, like Paris of old, a golden apple in his hand. He cast his eyes over the room, and there was a flutter in many a feminine heart over the object of his coming and the possible recipient of the golden apple. Struck by the beauty and grace of the fair Eikasia, one of the noted belles of the day, he paused before her to address a word to her. Already in the heart of the proud beauty there were anticipations of an imperial career. But Theophilus found no better topic to commence a conversation than the ungallant remark: "Woman is the source of evil in the world;" to which the young lady quickly replied: "Woman is also the cause of much good." Either the ready retort or the tone of her voice jarred on the captious mind of the monarch, and he passed on. His eye then fell on the modest features and graceful figure of the young Theodora, a rival beauty, and to her, without risking a word, he handed the apple. The shock was too severe for the slighted Eikasia, who had for a moment felt the thrill of gratified ambition, and was conscious of the possession of the endowments that would adorn the throne. She straightway retired to a monastery which she founded, and devoted her time to religious practices and intellectual pursuits. Many hymns were composed by her, which continued long in use in the Greek Church.

Perhaps it would have been better for Theophilus had he chosen Eikasia. Theodora, with all her modest demeanor, was self-assertive and proud, and as a devoted iconodule she caused her husband many an unhappy hour during his lifetime; and as soon as he was dead she set to work to undo his policy. The Empress Euphrosyne too soon realized the masterful spirit of the new empress as did Theodora's own mother, Theoktista, and the two dowagers

retired into the monastery of Gastria, which afforded them an agreeable retreat from the intrigues of the court.

Theodora is the heroine of another tale which illustrated an unbecoming trait in her character and the love of justice of Theophilus. It was the practice of money-loving officials to engage secretly in trade and to avoid the payment of custom duties by engaging the empress, or members of the imperial family, in commercial adventures. By these practices, gross injustice was done the merchants, and the revenues of the state suffered. Theophilus learned that the young empress had lent her name to one of these trading speculations, and he determined to handle the matter in such a way that, in future, a repetition would be impossible. He ascertained the time when a ship laden with a valuable cargo in the empress's name was about to arrive in Constantinople. He assembled his whole court on the quay to witness its arrival, and when the captain of the ship demanded free entry in the empress's name, Theophilus compelled him to unload and expose his precious cargo of Syrian merchandise, and then publicly burn it; then, turning to his wife, he remarked that never in the history of man had a Roman emperor or empress turned trader, and added the sharp reproach that her avarice had degraded the character of an empress into that of a merchant.

Theophilus died in 842, leaving the throne to his three-year-old son, Michael. His mother, Theodora, as she had been crowned empress, was regent in her own right, and she quickly proved herself one of the most self-assertive of Byzantine princesses. As Theophilus and his predecessors overturned the work of Irene, so Theodora immediately began to undo the iconoclastic policy of her deceased husband; and as her successors continued her policy, the regency of Theodora marks the end of iconoclasm and

the permanent establishment of image worship in the churches of the East, as of the West.

Within the first month of the commencement of the new reign, images had appeared once more in the churches of Constantinople, and the banished image worshippers were recalled from their places of exile. John the Grammarian, the patriarch who had served Theophilus, was deposed because he refused to convoke a synod for the repeal of iconoclastic decrees, and Methodius was appointed in his stead. A council of the church was held the same year at Constantinople, composed largely of the lately exiled bishops, abbots, and monks who had distinguished themselves as confessors in the cause of image worship. All the prominent bishops who had held iconoclastic opinions were expelled from their sees, and their places were filled by the orthodox. The practices and doctrines of the Iconoclasts were formally anathematized and banished forever from the orthodox church.

While the synod was being held, in the heart of Theodora a conflict was going on between her love of image worship and her affection for her deceased husband. She did not waver in her zeal for the orthodox church, but she did dread to think of her husband as consigned, as a heretic, to the pangs of hell. Consequently, she presented herself one day to the assembled clergy, and requested the passage of a decree to the effect that her deceased husband's sins had all been pardoned by the Church, and that divine grace had effaced the record of his persecutions of the saints. Deep dissatisfaction showed itself on the faces of all the clergy when she made this singular request, and when they hesitated to speak she uttered, with innocent frankness, a mild threat that if they did not act favorably on her petition, she would not exert her influence as regent to give them the victory over the

Iconoclasts, but would leave the affairs of the Church in their present status. The patriarch Methodius finally found his voice to tell her that the Church could use its office to release the souls of orthodox princes from the pains of hell, but unfortunately the prayers of the Church were of no avail in obtaining forgiveness from God for those who died without the pale of orthodoxy; that the Church was intrusted with the keys of heaven only to open and shut the gates of salvation to the living, while the dead were beyond its help.

Theodora, however, was determined all the more to secure salvation for her deceased husband. She declared that in his last moments the dying Theophilus had tenderly grasped and kissed an image she had laid on his breast. Although the probabilities were that the soul of Theophilus had already sped ere such an event took place, the wily Methodius saw in the statement an escape from the dilemma that faced the synod; and upon his recommendation the assembled clergy consented to absolve the dead emperor from excommunication and to receive him into the bosom of the orthodox church, declaring that, as his last moments were spent in the manner Theodora certified in a written attestation, Theophilus had found pardon with God.

Like her more celebrated predecessor Irene, Theodora exhibited a masterful ability in governing, and, in spite of her persecuting policy toward the Iconoclasts, she preserved the tranquillity of the Empire and enhanced its prestige. Like Irene, too, she became so engrossed in things religious and political that she shamefully neglected the education of her son. It is a sad commentary on the history of the Church that in the long series of emperors from Theodosius to Basil only two were utterly unfit for the high station to which they fell heir, and these were the sons of the two empresses whose names figure so

largely in the triumph of the image worshippers,—Irene's son, Constantine VI., and Theodora's son, Michael III.

Theodora, absorbed in imperial ambition, abandoned the training of her child to her brother Bardas, of whose profligate life she could not have been ignorant. Bardas reared the young Michael in the most reckless and unconscientious manner, permitting him to neglect his serious studies, and teaching him his own vices of drunkenness and debauchery. Michael proved to be an apt pupil in profligacy, and before he reached his majority had become a confirmed dipsomaniac. Meanwhile, his mother, with the aid of her minister, Theoktistus, arrogated to herself the sole direction of public business, and viewed with indifference her brother's corruption of the principles of her son. Perhaps she saw in his ruin the continuance and perpetuation of her own power; perhaps she feared that his influence would be cast with the Iconoclasts, as had been his father's before him, and that only by his wild career could he be prevented from overturning the cherished plans of her heart.

In spite of his irregular life, however, Michael manifested a strong will of his own, and, as the time of the attainment of his majority approached, he came to an open quarrel with his mother. He had fallen violently in love with Eudocia, the daughter of Inger, of the powerful family of Martinakes, and Theodora and her ministers saw in an alliance with this house the probability of a potent opposition to their own political influence. Theodora realized that she must in some manner prevent this marriage, and she exerted her maternal influence so strongly that she compelled the lad of sixteen to marry another lady named Eudocia, the daughter of Dekapolitas—thus repeating the unfortunate policy of Irene on a similar occasion. The young roué, however, balked in his purpose to make

Eudocia Ingerina his wife, straightway made her his mistress, and thus brought public disgrace on the court life of the day. His marriage also incensed him against the regency; and at the first opportunity, he asserted his majority, sanctioned the murder of the prime minister Theoktistus, and grew weary of the presence of his mother.

He succeeded in dismissing his mother and sisters from the palace, and even attempted to persuade the patriarch to give them the veil. With the hope of regaining her power over her son, Theodora formed a plot to assassinate her brother Bardas; but the plot was discovered, and Michael compelled her to retire to the monastery of Gastria, the usual residence of the ladies of the imperial family who were secluded from the world. Yet, the empress-mother never descended to the baseness of Irene, so as to seek the injury of her ungrateful son.

Meanwhile, Michael selected as his boon companion the courtier Basil, who had begun his career as a groom in the stables of some nobleman of the court. The two gave their time to debauchery and lust; and as a token of his favor, Michael compelled Basil to marry his discarded mistress, Eudocia Ingerina.

In the solitude of the cloister, Theodora deplored the ingratitude, the vices, and the inevitable ruin of her worthless son, and, repenting of her earlier folly in neglecting his bringing up, endeavored to make amends for the mistake of her past life. Finally, after the death of her brother, Theodora regained some of her maternal influence and was permitted to reside at the palace of Saint Mamas, where occurred the last sad tragedy of her career.

Basil, who in spite of all carousals could always keep his head, observed how his friend Michael had thrown away the high privileges of his station and had become an object of contempt in the eyes of all good men. His

overweening ambition to mount the throne overcame every noble sentiment, and he plotted to assassinate the emperor and to usurp supreme power. The tragedy occurred in the palace of the empress-mother. Basil and his wife, Eudocia Ingerina, were invited by her to a feast at her house, where Michael was present. An orgy ensued; Michael was carried to his room in a state of intoxication, and Basil and his conspirators succeeded in despatching him in his drunken sleep. Basil mounted the throne, and was destined to found the longest dynasty in the annals of the Empire. Theodora, bowed down with sorrows, and distressed beyond measure at the cruel destiny of her first-born, died in the first year of the reign of Basil I.

Theodora, because of her zeal for image worship, was eulogized as a saint by the ecclesiastical writers of both the Western and the Eastern Church, and is honored with a place in the Greek Calendar. Had her devotion to her children equalled her self-sacrificing loyalty to church affairs, she might have changed the course of Byzantine history. But, failing in her maternal duties, her name shared the ignominy as well as the glory of Irene, and, while not possessing the wickedness of the latter, she must rank as a queen who in neglecting her son brought disgrace on the Empire.

Basil I. was one of those remarkable men who after a career of infamy are sobered by great responsibilities and perform well the part which it was destined for them to play. But in his relations with women he had to endure the natural outcome of his earlier licentiousness. His first wife, whom he married at the beginning of his career, had lived but a few years, leaving him a son, Constantine, whom he associated with him on the throne, but who died after a lapse of ten years. Eudocia Ingerina, whom Michael had compelled him to marry, had a son, Leo, who succeeded

Basil on the throne, but the emperor was ever haunted with the suspicion that this lad was the son not of himself but of Michael. The adventures of this empress and of Michael's sister, Thekla, who also shared imperial honor, are sad proofs of the corruption of morals of the age. With her brother's consent, Thekla had become the concubine of Basil, and after he had assassinated Michael and ascended the throne, Thekla consoled herself with other lovers. On one occasion it happened that an attendant employed in the household of Thekla was waiting on the emperor, when the latter asked the shameless question: "Who is living with your mistress at present?" The attendant imprudently told the name of the successful lover; Basil's jealousy was aroused, and he ordered the paramour of the woman he had put aside to be seized, scourged, and immured for life in a monastery. It is even said that he ill treated Thekla and confiscated part of her property. But the Empress Eudocia Ingerina avenged the unfortunate princess in a manner more pardonable in the mistress of a besotted debauchee than in the wife of an emperor. When her amours were discovered, the empress was prudent enough to avoid scandal by merely compelling her lover to retire privately to a monastery.

In pleasing contrast to the story of these licentious princesses, revealing the absence of any shame in the high life of Constantinople, is that of the widow Danielis who played the lady bountiful to Basil in his earlier years, and to whom he delighted to show his gratitude after he had mounted the throne.

Once when he was an attaché of the courtier Theophilitzes, whom Theodora had sent on public business into the Peloponnesus, he fell sick at Patras. A wealthy widow, Danielis by name, who had been struck with the handsome looks of the gallant attaché, had him removed

to her house and carefully nursed him through his illness. When he recovered, she made Basil a member of her family, by uniting him with her own son John in those spiritual ties of brotherhood sanctioned by the Greek Church with peculiar rites; also she bestowed on him considerable wealth so that from that time on he could play well the part of a courtier, and had the means to make himself the boon companion, friend, and colleague of the erratic Michael.

The lasting friendship between the widow and the emperor constitutes the most interesting episode in the checkered career of Basil. When he became emperor, he displayed his gratitude by sending for the son of his former benefactress and making him *protospatharios,* or chief of the guards. He also urged the widow to visit him, and see her adopted son seated on the throne. The account of her journey to Constantinople, is a most valuable commentary on the life of Greek women in the ninth century, and shows how vast was the wealth of the few on Greek soil, and what an important part a wealthy widow could play in the affairs of state; the story is as follows:

"The lady Danielis set off from Patras in a litter or covered couch, carried on the shoulders of ten slaves; and the train which followed her, destined to relieve these litter bearers, amounted to three hundred persons. When she reached Constantinople, she was lodged in the palace of Magnaura, appropriated for the reception of princely guests. The rich presents she had prepared for the emperor astonished the inhabitants of the capital, for no foreign monarch had ever offered gifts of equal value to a Byzantine sovereign.

"The slaves that bore the gifts were themselves a part of the present, and were all distinguished for their youth,

beauty, and accomplishments. Four hundred young men, one hundred eunuchs and one hundred maidens, formed the living portion of this magnificent offering; while there were in addition, a hundred pieces of the richest colored drapery, one hundred pieces of soft woollen cloth, two hundred pieces of linen, and one hundred of cambric, so fine that each piece could be enclosed in the joint of a reed. To all this, a service of cups, dishes, and plates of gold and silver was added. When Danielis reached Constantinople, she found that the emperor had constructed a magnificent church as an expiation for the murder of his benefactor, Michael III. She sent orders to the Peloponnesus to manufacture carpets of unusual size, in order to cover the whole floor, that they might protect the rich mosaic pavement, in which a peacock with outspread tail astonished, by the extreme brilliancy of its coloring, every one who beheld it. Before the widow quitted Constantinople, she settled a considerable portion of her estate in Greece on her son, the *protospatharios,* and on her adopted child, the emperor, in joint property.

"After Basil's death, she again visited Constantinople; her own son was dead, so she constituted the Emperor Leo VI. her sole heir. On quitting the capital for the last time, she desired that the *protospatharios,* Zenobius, might be dispatched to the Peloponnesus, for the purpose of preparing a register of her extensive estate and immense property. She died shortly after her return; and even the imperial officers were amazed at the amount of her wealth; the quantity of gold coin, gold and silver plate, works of art in bronze, furniture, rich stuffs in linen, cotton, wool and silk, cattle and slaves, palaces and farms, formed an inheritance that enriched even an Emperor of Constantinople. The slaves of which Emperor Leo became the proprietor were so numerous that he ordered

three thousand to be enfranchised and sent to the *theme* of Longobardia (as Apulia was then called), where they were put in possession of land which they cultivated as serfs. After the payment of many legacies, and a division of part of the landed property, according to the disposition of the testament, the emperor remained possessor of eighty farms or villages."

This narrative furnishes a curious glimpse into the condition of society in Greece during the latter part of the ninth century, which is the period when the Greek race began to recover a numerical superiority and prepare for the consolidation of its political ascendency over the Slavonian colonists in the Poloponnesus.

It seems almost incredible that such wealth and power could be concentrated in the hands of one woman; and only when we consider the grinding poverty of the masses of the population through the extortions of the rich and the oppressions of the governing classes can we account for the resources which permitted the lavish luxuries of the aristocrats.

The fourscore years succeeding the death of Basil the Macedonian were taken up by the two long reigns of Leo VI.—reputed to be the son of Basil, but in all probability the son of Michael,—and Leo's son, Constantine Porphyrogenitus. These years were important for literature, as both son and grandson of the founder of the dynasty were authors of renown; but in historical interest and especially as regards the story of Byzantine womanhood they were the most uneventful and monotonous in the many centuries of the Empire's existence.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus was the child (by his fourth wife) of Leo's old age, and was only seven years old when he fell heir to the Empire. He was brought up under the tutelage of guardians; and so devoted was he to

the composing of books and the painting of pictures, that he was forty years of age before he assumed entire control of the reins of government; yet, twenty years of supreme power fell to his lot.

In his works, we have a beautiful picture of his domestic life. We do not know much of his wife, Helena, but he was devoted to his son Romanus, a gay, pleasure-loving prince, and to his daughters, of whom the youngest, Agatha, was his favorite secretary and the constant companion of his studies. "Seated by his side, she read to him all the official reports of the ministers; and when his health began to fail it was through her intermediation that he consented to transact public business. That such a proceeding created no alarming abuses and produced neither serious complaints nor family quarrels is more honorable to the heart of the princess than is her successful performance of her task to her good sense and ability."

The most interesting figure about him, however, was his daughter-in-law Theophano, who was destined to play a fatal part in the story of the Basilian house. Theophano was lowly born, and her beauty and grace could never win the court circle and the public to pardon a low alliance which disgraced the majesty of the purple. Hence, the vilest scandals were circulated about her, which must be taken with some degree of allowance.

According to the chroniclers, she was wildly ambitious and utterly lacking in natural affection, charming in manner, but cruel in heart. She and Romanus made a most striking couple as they appeared together in the court or took part in the public processions. Romanus was conspicuous for his beauty and strength, tall and erect, fair and florid in complexion, with aquiline nose and sparkling eyes. Theophano was of the pure Greek type in features, yet small of stature and of infinite ease of manner and

movement. According to the Byzantine writers, she craved eagerly for supreme power, and poisoned her father-in-law to hasten her husband's elevation to the throne. Constantine did not take enough of the beverage administered by her hand to end his life, but his constitution was weakened, and after a short period of time he passed away. Romanus's name was also embraced in the story, he having been induced, through the wiles of his wife, to enter into a conspiracy against their father and benefactor. But Constantine's picture of his own family life is so amiable, that it is as difficult to give credence to the accusation brought against Romanus and Theophano as it is to Procopius's tales regarding Theodora Justinian.

Romanus II. had held the throne but five years when he too sickened and died, and it was rumored that Theophano had mingled for him the same deadly draught which she had prepared for her father-in-law. The young empress was left as regent of her two little sons, Basil, aged seven, and Constantine, who was only two. She aspired first to reign alone; but soon realizing the Byzantine dislike for feminine rule, she found a protector and a guardian for her sons in Nicephorus, the most valiant soldier of the Empire. He was given the hand of the beautiful empress-dowager, and was crowned as the colleague of the two young Cæsars. His personal ugliness and deformity rendered it impossible for Theophano to love him, and the match was one of interest rather than of affection. But Nicephorus proved himself a most affectionate co-regent, and paid scrupulous regard to the rights of the young princes. Much of his time was spent in the field, and many were the victories which he won for the Byzantine arms. But even his great achievements could not enchain the heart of the capricious empress.

Theophano, during the absence of her grim and ugly husband, had become enamored of his favorite nephew, John Zimisces, who was also a warrior of note. John listened to the voice of the tempter, not so much for lust as for ambition, and conspired with the empress against his uncle and benefactor. The treacherous murder was accomplished one December night in the year 969, in the imperial apartments of the palace.

Some of the conspirators had been concealed in the chamber of Theophano. John Zimisces and his principal companions crossed the Bosporus in a small boat, landed under the palace walls, and in the darkness of night silently ascended a ladder of ropes which was cast down by the handmaidens of the empress. Nicephorus, as was his custom, was sleeping on a bearskin on the floor of his chamber, when he was awakened by the noisy entrance of the conspirators. Their daggers were drawn, and, at the word from John, were plunged into the body of the valiant general, who exclaimed in his death agony: "Oh, God! grant me thy mercy." Though by this base deed John came to the throne, he showed deep contrition for the slaughter of his uncle; and through the connivance of the patriarch and treachery toward his friends, he avoided marriage with the partner of his guilt.

"On the day of his coronation, he was stopped on the threshold of Saint Sophia by the intrepid patriarch, who charged his conscience with the deed of treason and blood, and required as a sign of repentance that he should separate himself from his more criminal associate. This sally of apostolic zeal was not offensive to the prince, since he could neither love nor trust a woman who had violated the most sacred obligation; and Theophano, instead of sharing his imperial throne, was dismissed with ignominy from his bed and palace." Deprived of her place as regent, and

repudiated by her sons on whom she had brought shame, Theophano passed the remaining years of her life in a monastery.

Of the two sons of Theophano, Basil II., after a long reign of over half a century,—963–1025,—distinguished by his many victories over the Bulgarians, died childless, and was succeeded by his brother, Constantine IX., who was destined to be the last male of the Macedonian house. After his short reign of three years, the story of the remaining twenty-nine years of the Basilian dynasty gathers itself about the names of his two elderly daughters, Zoe and Theodora, and the series of princes who owed their position on the throne solely to them. It is a period of decadence, and the reader cannot help but pity the two sisters who were endeavoring to uphold a decaying dynasty in the midst of corruption and folly. Zoe constitutes the central figure of the period; but Theodora was vastly her superior, and casts a sort of glamour about the closing years of the house of Basil the Macedonian.

Zoe, however, was notable not so much for her ability to govern as for her extraordinary vanity and love of adulation. Yet, for some reason, she had reached the age of forty-eight before she found a husband. Upon his death-bed, Constantine summoned Romanus Argyrus, an aged nobleman, to the palace and informed him that he had been selected to mount the throne, but that he must divorce his wife and marry one of the imperial princesses. Romanus hesitated, not that he cared not for the throne, but because the conditions were too severe; he loved his wife, and he did not fancy joining his lot with one of the elderly maidens. But he was told that he must either obey or lose his eyesight. To relieve the situation, his wife, with self-sacrificing devotion, took the veil and entered a monastery. Constantine destined Theodora, the younger and

more capable of his daughters, for the throne as spouse to Romanus, but through religious compunctions she refused to marry the husband of another woman, and consequently Zoe was chosen as bride and empress at the tender age of forty-eight. Romanus was sixty when he ascended the throne.

Zoe never forgave her sister Theodora the fact that because of her more stable character their father had offered his younger daughter the throne; Romanus had no love for her because she had refused him. Consequently, spies were set over her movements, and every effort was made to connect her with the various plots of courtiers who had designs upon the throne. Finally, accused of being privy to the plans of one of the most hostile of the courtiers, Theodora was driven from her palace and imprisoned in the monastery of Petrion; sometime after, Zoe, upon a visit to the monastery, compelled her sister to assume the monastic habit.

Romanus and Zoe were never an affectionate couple. He devoted himself strictly to affairs of state and looked with indifference upon the many intrigues of his amorous spouse, who, like Queen Elizabeth, believed herself to be the mistress of all hearts. But one of these amours, perhaps, cost him his life.

The royal consorts had turned the management of the palace largely over to eunuchs. One of these, John the Paphlagonian, became very powerful, and, as he was precluded from the imperial title himself, sought to raise a brother to that high honor. This brother, Michael, had begun life as a goldsmith and money changer, but his brother appointed him to a place in the imperial household. Owing to his personal beauty and graceful and dignified manners, he soon became the favorite chamberlain to his royal mistress. Unfortunately, however, he

was subject to sudden and violent attacks of epilepsy. This, instead of repelling Zoe, merely aroused her pity, and she fell in love with her handsome servant and carried on an amorous intrigue with him. Romanus was duly informed of his wife's conduct, but remained indifferent to it and probably deemed the accusation untenable because of the epilepsy of Michael. Zonaras, an ancient chronicler, tells the story that in the night the emperor frequently called Michael to rub his feet when he was in bed with Zoe. And he naïvely adds: "Who can refrain from supposing that the hands of the young valet-de-chambre did not find an opportunity of touching also the feet of the empress?" During the last two years of his life, Romanus was afflicted with a wasting disease and rumor had it that it was due to a slow poison administered either by Zoe, or by the eunuch John, who wished to bring about his brother's elevation. At any rate, in his dying moments, before the breath had left his body, the empress quitted his bedside to take measures with John the Paphlagonian for placing her epileptic paramour on the throne.

The moment Romanus III. ceased to live, Zoe called an assembly of the officers of state in the palace and invested Michael IV. with the diadem and the purple robe. He was straightway proclaimed Emperor of the Romans, and was formally seated beside Zoe on the vacant throne. The patriarch Alexius was filled with disgust at this flagrant display of contempt for decency, but for reasons of state and to avoid greater scandal, he celebrated the marriage between the empress and her paramour. "Thus a single night saw the aged Zoe the wife of two emperors, a widow and a bride, and Michael a menial and a sovereign."

Michael was twenty-eight when he wedded Zoe at the age of fifty-four and ascended the throne. In spite of his humble origin, he showed himself a capable ruler, and

succeeded in repelling some of the enemies of the Empire. But his usefulness was hindered by his epileptic fits and by the unfriendly attitude of his subjects who regarded his disease as evidence of the divine wrath because of his ingratitude toward his benefactor, Romanus. He became a hopeless invalid before the age of thirty-six, and, when he felt his end approaching, he renounced the world and all the vanities of imperial station, and retired to the monastery of Saint Anarghyras where he became a monk. He died on December 10, 1041, after a reign of seven years and eight months.

After the death of her second husband, the irrepressible Zoe at first attempted to carry on the Empire alone, with the assistance of the eunuchs of her household, but the prevailing aversion to female sovereignty and her own disinclination to be without companionship of the male sex led her to a realization of the necessity of giving the Empire a male sovereign. The alternative which presented itself was whether she should adopt a son or marry a husband. Having twice experienced matrimonial bliss, but never having tasted the joys of filial devotion, for the sake of a new sensation Zoe adopted the former expedient.

She selected for the honor another Michael, the nephew of her late husband, but, as she was aware of his volatile character, she made him take a solemn oath, before conferring on him the crown, that he would ever regard her as his benefactress and treat her as his mother. Michael was ready enough to promise everything, and the diadem was placed on his head.

But as soon as he was established in power, Michael V. revealed his meanness of soul, and showed both insolence and ingratitude toward the woman through whom he had attained his elevation. He finally carried his insolence so far that he banished the empress Zoe to Prince's Island

and compelled her to adopt the monastic habit. But this base act was more than the people could stand. Their fury burst through every restraint. The mob paraded the streets and proclaimed the reign of Michael at an end. They threatened to seize him and scatter his bones abroad like dust. An assembly was held in the church of Saint Sophia, to which the aged Theodora was brought from the monastery of Petrion, and she was proclaimed joint empress with her sister Zoe. In the meantime, Michael, alarmed at the rapid and overwhelming spread of the sedition, had Zoe brought back to the palace, and endeavored to pacify the people by persuading her to appear on a balcony overlooking the Hippodrome. But it was impossible for him to stem the current of the popular fury. The palace was stormed, and three thousand people were killed in the conflict which followed. Michael saved his life by escaping to the monastery of Studion; his eyes were finally put out, and he passed the rest of his days in the garb of a monk.

Zoe immediately entered upon the duties and responsibilities of power, of which for a time she had been deprived, and she endeavored to force her sister back into religious retirement; but the Senate and people insisted upon the joint reign of the two sisters. But this singular union lasted less than two months. In temperament and in interests the two sisters were antipodal. Different factions were their support, the clerical party favoring the devout Theodora, and the worldlings the volatile Zoe. For a time, the twain appeared always side by side at the meetings of the Senate and at the courts of justice. Unlike Zoe, Theodora showed great aptitude for public business, and took pleasure in performing her administrative duties.

Zoe's plots against her sister being frustrated, and recognizing that Theodora was rapidly gaining the ascendency,

she bethought herself of taking a third husband, to whom she might resign the throne and thus deprive her sister of the influence she was rapidly acquiring.

Hence, at the advanced age of sixty-two, Zoe began to cast about for a third husband, in spite of the canons of the Church, which forbade a third marriage. Her thoughts first turned to a powerful nobleman, Constantine Dalasennus, whom her father had once chosen for her in her earlier years, and about whom her recollections cast a halo of romance. But in place of the gallant hero of her imagination she found she had summoned to the palace for an interview a stern old gentleman, who strongly expressed his disapprobation of the existing imperial system; who censured in unmeasured terms the vices of the court, and who took no pains to conceal his contempt for her own questionable conduct. Such a spouse would have been a most excellent antidote for the prevailing corruption of the Empire, but Zoe had no desire to submit to the control of so severe a master, and she quickly made up her mind to look elsewhere.

A former lover, Constantine Artoclinas, then became the object of her matrimonial designs. But he already had a wife, who was not of the self-sacrificing disposition of the wife of Romanus. As soon as she heard of the honor to which Zoe destined her husband, Constantine Artoclinas fell ill and did not long survive. It was the general opinion that his wife had poisoned him, either through jealousy of Zoe, or because she felt an aversion to passing the rest of her days in a convent. Zoe, however, was readily consoled.

She again selected an old admirer, Constantine Monomachus, whom Michael IV. had banished to Mitylene because of his attentions to the empress, but who had been recalled on the accession of Zoe and Theodora and

appointed to a high official position in Greece. An imperial galley was despatched with a royal courier to notify him of the new dignity that awaited him, and to bring him back to Constantinople. Upon his arrival he was invested with the imperial robes. His marriage with Zoe was performed by one of the clergy, for the patriarch Alexius declined to officiate at the third marriage of the empress, which in this case was doubly uncanonical, as both Zoe and Constantine had been twice married.

The choice made by Zoe is a sad commentary on the immorality of the age. The life and character of Constantine X. show the utter lack of moral principle which prevailed in the court circles. After he had buried two wives, Constantine Monomachus had won the affections of a beautiful and wealthy young widow called Sclerena, who openly became his mistress and accompanied him in his exile to Mitylene. Yet, in the eyes of the orthodox, her position as mistress was more respectable, as being less uncanonical than if she had become his third wife. As Sclerena had stood by him in the days of his adversity, Constantine insisted upon her sharing with him his prosperity, and when he assumed the purple he bargained with Zoe that he should retain his mistress, a condition to which Zoe in her shamelessness agreed. Hence, "the people of Constantinople were treated to the singular spectacle of an Emperor of the Romans making his public appearance with two female companions dignified with the title of Empress, one as his wife, the other as his mistress."

Sclerena was officially saluted with the title of Augusta, and possessed a rank equal to that of Theodora, whose relative importance had been reduced by the advent of the Emperor Constantine X. She held a court of her own and was installed in apartments of the imperial palace.

Owing to her beauty and her elegant manners she gathered about her a brilliant court circle, which in its sumptuousness and ostentation contrasted greatly with the dull ceremony and sombre atmosphere of the apartments of the elderly sisters, Zoe and Theodora. Sclerena's disposition, too, was amiable and winning, and she was admired for the constancy with which she had clung to her lover in the days of his misfortune. Constantine, in return for her self-sacrificing devotion when he was an impoverished exile, sought to repay her by the most lavish expenditure of the public funds. Her apartments were made the most elegant and luxurious in the city, and her toilettes were the envy of all the aristocratic ladies of Constantinople.

Though Constantine showed in every way his partiality for his mistress, it did not disturb the domestic tranquillity of the imperial household. Zoe and Sclerena lived on the best of terms, and the utter absence of jealousy in the aged wife is less remarkable than her utter shamelessness.

The moral feelings of the people, however, were not so completely corrupted as those of their superiors. They resented the lavish expenditures of the public moneys upon the concubine of the emperor, and they also resented the insult thus put upon their empress. They felt that the lives of the aged sisters, the only survivors of the Macedonian house, could not be safe in a palace where vice reigned supreme, and where secret murders had so often occurred.

The incensed populace raised a sedition on the feast of the Forty Martyrs, when it became the duty of the emperor to walk in solemn procession to the church of Our Saviour in Chalke, whence he proceeded on horseback to the church of the Martyrs. As the procession was about to move from the palace, a cry was raised: "Down with Sclerena; we will not have her for empress! Zoe and

Theodora are our mothers—we will not allow them to be murdered!" The mob then sought to lay hands on the emperor to tear him in pieces, but the tumult was quieted by the sudden appearance of Zoe and Theodora on the balcony and the people were dispersed without serious damage being done.

The Empress Zoe died in 1050, at the age of seventy. Constantine X. survived to the year 1055. He, before the end came, was anxious to name his successor, but as soon as Theodora heard of the attempt of her brother-in-law to deprive her of the throne, she hastened to the palace, where the Senate was quickly convened, and presented herself as the lawful empress. With universal acclamation, Theodora was proclaimed sole sovereign of the Empire.

Though seventy-five years of age when she became sole ruler of the destinies of the Eastern Empire, Theodora exhibited great vigor of character and her short reign was a fortunate period for the Byzantines, owing to her attention to public business and the freedom from external conflicts. To preserve power in her own hands, Theodora presided in person at the meetings of the Cabinet and the Senate, and heard appeals as supreme judge in civil cases. Her long monastic life had developed in her the narrow views and acrimonious passions of a recluse, but an ascetic spirit was a relief after the sensual performances of the court of Constantinople. Even at the advanced age of seventy-six, Theodora felt so robust that she looked forward to a long life. The monks flattered her with prophecies that she was to reign for many years. But in the midst of her plans, she was suddenly attacked by an intestinal disorder that speedily brought her to the grave. Theodora was the last scion of a family which had upheld with glory the institutions of the Empire for nearly two

centuries, and had secured to its subjects a degree of internal tranquillity and commercial prosperity far greater than that enjoyed during the same period by any other portion of the human race. "And with her, expired the race of Basil, the Slavonian groom, and the administrative glory of the Byzantine Empire, on the 30th of August, 1057."

What a contrast is offered between the empresses of these later centuries and the great names of the earlier period, Eudoxia and Pulcheria and Eudocia and the great Theodora! We have fallen on evil times; and in the general corruption, woman has degenerated. During the remaining centuries which it falls to our lot to consider, we shall find that the chronicles of women continue to exhibit the downward march of womanhood, until with the utter debasement of woman, the fabric of society gives way, and all is darkness in the history of the sex.

We have had a glimpse of the luxury with which the Empress Eudoxia surrounded herself in her palace on the Bosporus, and our curiosity and interest may be satisfied concerning the domestic surroundings of a woman of rank during the period of the Byzantine decadence. The only truly original Christian art, down to the eleventh century, was the Byzantine; it dominated both Christian and pagan artists. In the period to which we refer, military exigencies did not permit of numerous apartments. We find the great room, the place of reunion, a sumptuously decorated apartment, in which also the meals were served and the bed was placed.

This chief room showed little constructive quality, but it was superbly decorated. The square, heavy door was usually contrived below a relieving arch, whose archivolt was richly charged with sculptured and painted ornaments; the twin windows were supported by a pied-droit or on

small columns. The flat walls rarely had a real projecting entablature; the ends of joists were simulated by cornices resting on consoles or modillions; the architrave and the frieze were only a painted effect. The floor was of bricks. Chimneys were not yet used, and the apartment was warmed by hot air supplied from a *hypocaustum,* placed within the walls or below the floor, and admitted through a painted iron grating.

The wall decorations presented an infinite variety of beautifully executed mouldings and scroll designs of flowers and foliage, common to the Byzantine style. A prominent feature of the mural decoration was the numerous figures, in stiff attitudes, draped with garments falling in meagre folds, and decked with abundant fringes and precious stones, after the Oriental fashion; close to these figures were placed groups of Greek letters.

The furniture of the room was sober in style. The bed was shaped and ornamented somewhat like a modern sofa. The occupant reclined rather than lay on it, for the cushions were heaped up increasingly toward the head of the bed. It was customary to sleep without garments, the only covering being an ample sheet. A curtain on sliding rings was indispensable; it served to screen from draughts, as well as to separate beds; moreover, it supplemented the scanty furniture of the room.

Over the bed was a lighted lamp. This was invariably used, for darkness was dreaded, and it was believed that the light kept off evil spirits and prevented baleful apparitions. In this room the great lady of our period received her guests; here intrigues were plotted; here she partook of her repasts, waited upon by her many serving-maids; here she passed, indeed, most of her life.

Chapter XLV

The Princesses of the Comneni

XIV

THE PRINCESSES OF THE COMNENI

WITH the end of the Macedonian house in 1057, all the elements of discord in the Byzantine Empire seemed to have been loosed. Civil war and foreign invasions rapidly succeeded one another, and the empire hastened to its doom. But the downward progress was for a time checked by the rise of the Comneni, a prominent family, who controlled the destinies and exerted a paramount influence over the career of the Byzantine government for over a century, in fact, until its overthrow by the Latin Crusaders in 1204. In the chronicles of the Comneni, its princesses played a notable though not always creditable rôle; and the undercurrent of Byzantine history for a century and a half was determined largely by woman's influence and woman's artifice.

Of the great families whose names appear on every page of the Byzantine history of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, that of the Comneni is by far the most illustrious. The hypothesis that the Comneni were an ancient Roman house which followed Constantine from Old Rome to New Rome must be given up: so important an item in the family glories of the house would not have been passed over in silence by Anna Comnena and her husband in their historical works. We must accept the testimony of a contemporary, Psellus, that the family was of Greek or

Thracian origin, and derived its name from the ancestral seat, the village of Comne in the valley of the Torniga, near the site of the city of Adrianople.

The first of the line prominent in Byzantine annals was the illustrious Manuel Comnenus, who, under Basil II., aided in settling the troubled condition of the East and in reëstablishing the Empire on a firm footing. As a result of his labors for the state, Manuel acquired vast estates in Cappadocia, and, from this time, his family ranked as one of the wealthiest and most aristocratic houses of the Byzantine nobility.

Manuel, upon his deathbed, left his two sons, Isaac and John, to the care and the gratitude of his sovereign. The two lads were carefully educated in all the learning and trained in all the manly accomplishments of the day; and their brotherly love became the subject of comment in an age when self-seeking was the most salient characteristic of the aristocratic class. When they attained manhood, both made brilliant marriages which greatly increased the lustre of their family name: Isaac married a captive princess of Bulgaria, and John wedded Anna Dalassena, the daughter of the patrician Dalassenus, nicknamed Charon from the number of enemies he had sent to the infernal regions. Isaac was fated to die childless and his wife is unknown to fame, but Anna, the wife of John, was destined to be the most remarkable woman of her house.

The Empress Theodora, in her last days, had nominated Michael VI.,—Stratioticus,—an aged and decrepit veteran, as her successor; but his elevation was resented by the soldiers, who plotted and successfully carried through a conspiracy by which Michael was dispossessed and Isaac Comnenus, at that time the most popular general of the East, was elevated to the throne. But the usurpation was not attended with the blessings of heaven: Isaac was

stricken with disease before he had reigned a full year, and retired to a monastery to die, abdicating the throne and selecting his brother John as his successor. For some unaccountable reason, and much to the chagrin of his wife Anna, whose ambitions were distinctly imperial, John declined the honor, and persisted in his refusal in spite of the entreaties of his wife and relatives, and with a seeming blindness to the welfare of the state. Possibly he felt that a curse rested upon a dynasty which had usurped the throne. Constantine Ducas, another Cappadocian patrician, was then selected; during his reign of seven troubled years he proved himself to be a sorry administrator. His empress, Eudocia Makremvolitissa, and Anna Dalassena are the two dominating personalities who determined the tenor of court intrigue and largely influenced the course of the events of this period. Anna most intensely hated Ducas and all his house, for they were occupying a throne which she thought should have been retained in her own family; and her relations with the empress were those of rivalry or of friendship, in proportion as Eudocia was acting in sympathy with or in opposition to her husband's family.

Constantine XI.—Ducas—was as intensely partisan as Anna; and when he found his end approaching, he wished above all things to assure the elevation of his three children, Michael, Andronicus, and Constantine. Constantine was well aware of the dangers which his dynasty would incur should the empress marry a second time; before conferring upon her the regency of the Empire, he therefore exacted from her a most solemnly attested promise that under no circumstances would she take a second husband. This important document was deposited in the hands of the patriarch, John Xiphilinus. Constantine made the Senate, also, take an oath never to acknowledge

any other emperor than one of his own children. Feeling that he had bound his wife by irretrievable bonds, and that every precaution had been taken to assure the implicit fulfilment of his wishes, Constantine breathed his last with a contented mind.

But Eudocia soon discovered the need of a strong arm for the protection of her own rights and those of her sons. A woman of executive gifts, she was also devoted to literary pursuits, and her knowledge of history had taught her with how much reluctance the Byzantines submitted to the sovereignty of a woman. She recalled, too, the experience of the Empress Theophano, who had found prudent guardians for her sons, Basil II. and Constantine IX., in the persons of the soldiers Nicephorus II. and John I., though she was appalled by the vices of this empress, who had married and murdered the first and been scorned by the second guardian. Furthermore, threatening invasions and domestic unrest proved the need of a soldier as her colleague in the Empire. Love came to the assistance of reason, and Eudocia determined to break her vows and to take a second husband.

Romanus Diogenes, the most daring and popular general of the Empire, had been convicted of treason for participation in a conspiracy against her children's throne, and was then in prison awaiting sentence of death from Eudocia as regent. The latter, however, became enamored of her distinguished captive, and his beauty and valor convinced her that he was destined to share with her the throne. The army was clamoring for his release; and when he received a full pardon from the empress-regent, it at first created no suspicion of her romantic designs. The Seljúkian Turks were at that time overrunning Cappadocia, and it was necessary that the army should be under the control of an able and a daring general. Romanus was

therefore raised from the scaffold to the headship of the army.

Before the empress could take any further step toward carrying out her matrimonial intentions, it was necessary to secure possession of the document which evidenced her pledge to her husband that she never would contract a second marriage. Feminine diplomacy enabled her to accomplish this delicate task; and the lack of principle and high moral character in the patriarch caused him to fall readily into the net laid for him by Eudocia.

Xiphilinus at first urged upon her emissary the sanctity of the oath the empress had taken, and the sacred nature of the trust he had assumed; but when it was whispered in his presence that his own brother was destined for the high honor, the patriarch's scruples were relaxed, and he yielded—out of proper regard, as he alleged, for the welfare of the state. He resigned the important paper into the empress's hand, and at her solicitation proposed and carried through a measure in the Senate, favoring her second marriage, and in addition released the senators from their vow never to recognize as emperor any other than a son of Constantine. Great was the confusion of the credulous patriarch when he realized that he had been outwitted by the clever woman, who, when her plans were fully matured, made an official proclamation that she had selected Romanus IV.,—Diogenes,—the most brilliant general of the Empire, to share with her the throne and to act as guardian to her sons.

Her choice was the occasion of much satisfaction to the army and the people, but caused jealousy and dissension in the imperial household. John Ducas, the late emperor's brother, held the rank of Cæsar and was the natural guardian of his nephews; he at once began to conspire for the overthrow of Romanus and the retirement of Eudocia.

The new emperor at once assumed his duties of warding off the enemies of the Empire, and engaged in a deadly conflict with the Seljúkian Turks. Though at first successful, his army was finally routed and almost annihilated, and Romanus himself was taken captive, on the fatal field of Manzikert, 1071,—a decisive battle that marked the beginning of the end of Byzantine history and presaged the final conquest of Constantinople by the Turks. Romanus's capture produced a revolution at court. John Ducas seized the reins of government, ostensibly in the interests of Michael VII., son of Constantine; and when Romanus, having been released by his gallant foe, returned to Constantinople, Ducas had him seized and blinded and left to die through neglect. Eudocia was forced to retire to a monastery and take the veil; there she devoted herself to literary labors. She is reputed to be the author of a learned work, still extant, entitled *Ionia,* a species of historical and mythological dictionary. The last public appearance of the hapless Eudocia was on the occasion of the funeral of the valiant Romanus, which she was permitted to celebrate in an imposing manner.

A period of anarchy followed the cruel death of Romanus, and there were at one time no less than six pretenders to the throne. Throughout this trying period John Ducas maintained his power as regent, relinquishing his regency only when his ward, Michael VII., became of age and asserted his rights. Michael was fortunate in the choice of his empress, Princess Maria, daughter of the King of Iberia, whose beauty and grace are celebrated by the historian Anna Comnena. When her husband was overthrown and slain by the rebel Nicephorus Botaniates, Maria married the latter, with the hope of securing the throne for her child and the regency for herself. And from this time on her story is closely interwoven

with that of the Comneni princesses, to whom we now return.

John Comnenus died soon after Constantine Ducas, leaving to the widowed Anna the task of bringing up a large family of eight children,—Manuel, Isaac, Alexius, Adrian, Nicephorus, Maria, Eudocia, and Theodora. But Anna was equal to the task, and deserves to be ranked among the great mothers of the world. She gave herself up to the proper education of her sons and daughters, and to the promotion of their political advancement. She could never console herself for the loss of an imperial crown through the weakness of her husband, and all her tireless energy was directed toward recovering her lost opportunity and reaching the throne through the elevation of one of her sons. What is recounted of her shows that she was a woman of extraordinary intelligence, inexhaustible energy, remarkable political astuteness, and inordinate ambition.

After performing political services of great merit, Manuel, the eldest, died at an early age. The mother sought to make her sons Isaac and Alexius men who could show themselves capable of performing every task imposed upon them in the high station they were destined to acquire; and the proof of the influence she exerted in the formation of their characters is seen not only in their high attainments, but also in the ascendency she retained over Alexius when he had reached the throne.

Owing to her undying hatred of the house of Ducas, Anna attached herself to the party of the Empress Eudocia and Romanus, and, being then in high favor at court, she married her daughter Theodora to Romanus's son Constantine. The revolution made by John Ducas to the advantage of himself and his ward, Michael VII., upset all the well-laid plans of Anna Dalassena; and the fall of Romanus

marked for a time the end of the favor of the Comneni. Anna showed her firmness of character by remaining faithful to the cause of the dethroned emperor. Her correspondence with him was detected, and she was exiled, with her children, to one of the Prince's Isles. Her exile did not last long, however, for she was recalled and restored to favor; and Michael VII. brought about the marriage of Isaac, the eldest son since the death of Manuel, to Irene, daughter of an Alanian prince, and cousin-german to the Empress Maria.

Meanwhile, another matrimonial scheme was being matured, which was not at all in accordance with the wishes of Anna and the empress. John Ducas, from the monastery to which he had retired, projected the marriage of his granddaughter Irene, with Alexius Comnenus, who was rapidly growing in promise and influence, and was already giving evidence of his political astuteness and diplomacy. Alexius gladly welcomed an alliance which would unite the two most powerful families of Constantinople in his interest, but his patrician mother opposed any affiliation with the rival house, and hated the very name of Ducas. The Empress Maria also had plans for Alexius, with which she feared this alliance would interfere, and at first threatened open opposition. But Alexius won his point with his usual cleverness. Anna finally yielded to his persuasion, and the empress gave her reluctant consent. The result of the union was that Alexius at once became the most powerful of the younger nobles at the court.

The next step in his career was also determined by the profound wisdom or wily caprice of a woman. To the surprise of her friends and consternation of her enemies, the Empress Maria adopted Alexius as her son. Anna Dalassena in all probability had a hand in this move for the elevation of her house, but it is difficult to see what was

the motive of the empress, who had a young son, Constantine, whom she wished to succeed to the purple. Perhaps she felt the need of a strong hand to support the claims of herself and her son against her second husband, the usurper Nicephorus Botaniates. Perhaps she was captivated by the manly vigor and personal charms of the young man, and wished to play with Alexius the rôle of Theophano with Zimisces. It is impossible to state her motive, but the step was the first move toward the final overthrow of her house and the succession of the Comneni.

Alexius had now all the reins of power in his hands, and a revolution against Botaniates ensued. The usurper was overthrown and Alexius was proclaimed emperor by the army. At first Constantine, the son of the Empress Maria and Michael VII., was associated with him on the throne, though still in his minority. Anna Dalassena and Maria, dreading the ascendency of Irene Ducas, wife of Alexius, plotted to prevent her coronation as empress, but the patriarch, who was a partisan of the house of Ducas, defeated their intrigues; a few days after Alexius assumed the purple, Irene, with imposing ceremonies, was crowned empress.

Alexius well knew how to gain over to his support and utilize for his schemes the intriguing women who were about him. He had a profound respect for the political sagacity of his mother and during the earlier years of his reign her word exerted a deep influence on the course of government. When he was called away from Constantinople by the wars that demanded his personal attention, he left his mother as regent during his absence.

The first offspring of the union of Alexius and Irene was a daughter, Anna Comnena. She was in her infancy affianced to Constantine, and the two were regarded as heirs to the throne, much to the delight of the ex-Empress

Maria. In the ceremonies of the court, the names of Constantine and Anna immediately followed those of Alexius and Irene.

Finally, in 1088, the empress bore a son, the third of her children. The joy of Alexius was unbounded. Seeing the possibility of his son carrying on the dynasty and perpetuating the name of Comnenus, Alexius determined to set aside the claims of Constantine and his eldest daughter. An estrangement with Maria Ducas followed. In 1092, John in his fourth year was proclaimed emperor, and Constantine was deprived of his rights. The rupture between Alexius and Maria was a source of enmity to the reigning house. Chagrined at the failure of her plans, and at the usurpation of one to whom she had shown every kindness, the ex-empress took part in a conspiracy against Alexius. But the plot was exposed in time, and all who were engaged in it were severely punished, except the ex-empress, who was permitted by her adopted son to go into peaceful retirement.

Constantine, though no longer associated on the throne, was still affianced to Anna, but an early death removed him from the scene of action and the intrigues of the court. In 1097, Anna was married to Nicephorus Bryennius, scion of a noble house. The mother, Anna Dalassena, continued for some time to be a powerful factor at court, but, becoming unpopular and realizing that she was losing her hold on her imperial son, she finally followed the usual custom of retiring to a monastery.

Thus the ex-Empress Maria and Anna—the real founder of the fortune of her house—found in religious retirement and meditation a life of peace and tranquillity after the turmoils of revolutions and the intrigues of imperial politics. The one had seen the failure of her plans and the downfall of her house; the other could look with pride

upon the full fruition of her plots for the elevation of the Comneni.

The reign of Alexius I.,—Comnenus,—occupies a considerable place not only in Byzantine, but, also, in general history. It inaugurated a new era in the relations between the East and the West, between the Greek and the Latin, both in affairs of Church and state, and the events of which the tragic expedition of 1204 was the climax had their beginning in the days when the courtiers of Alexius revelled with the companions of Godfrey of Bouillon. Equally important is this reign from the point of view of the Byzantine Empire; it put an end to the anarchy of the eleventh century, it established a dynasty which restored much of the territory that weak rulers had lost, and for over a century it preserved the tottering Empire from its inevitable fall. It was a period in which woman's influence was marked, and its record is well known to us because of the literary skill of Anna Comnena. This imperial princess is the first woman in the world's annals to write an extended history. Both in learning and in personality she has won a place among the notable women of the world, and hers is the last great name in the chronicles of Byzantine womanhood.

In the comprehensive education which Anna received, we have a view of the literary prominence of the Comnenic epoch. She had the best masters the Empire afforded, and in her childhood she exhibited a phenomenal capacity for learning. Her teachers gave her thorough training in the works of classical authors. She read Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristophanes, the Tragedians and Polybius under suitable guidance, and without assistance mastered the writings of the church fathers. She studied with avidity ancient mythology, geography, history, rhetoric, and dialectic, and was also versed in Platonic and Aristotelian

philosophy. It was in history, however, that she found her chief delight, and she early conceived the idea of composing a work in honor of her father's reign.

We have already mentioned the incidents of her childhood. Anna never forgave her brother John for supplanting her, and this disappointment of her tender years largely influenced the course of her later life. She was devoted to Maria, the mother of her first betrothed, and no doubt imbibed from her much of the ambition and hatred which were the marked characteristics of her career in politics. Her empress-mother, Irene, also exhibited a marked partiality for her eldest daughter, to the disparagement of her son, whom Alexius had destined for the throne. Irene was a beautiful and intriguing princess of much natural ability, and stood in awe of the greater learning of her daughter. The two became companions in intrigue and diplomacy, and worked together for the promotion of their own interests, against the schemes of Alexius and John. Anna was married at a tender age to Nicephorus Bryennius. He was the representative of one of the most aristocratic and powerful families of Constantinople, and exhibited much ability both in authorship and statecraft, but he seems mediocre and colorless by the side of his spouse.

Walter Scott laid the scene of his *Count Robert of Paris* in the Constantinople of this period, and he presents an interesting picture of Anna as a devotee of the Muses, and of the principal heroes and heroines who figure in the intrigues of the court at this time:

"It was an apartment of the palace of the Blaquernal, dedicated to the especial service of the beloved daughter of the Emperor Alexius, the Princess Anna Comnena, known to our times by her literary talents, which record the history of her father's reign. She was seated, the

queen and sovereign of a literary circle, such as the imperial princess, Porphyrogenita (or born in the sacred purple chamber itself), could assemble in those days, and a glance round will enable us to form an idea of her guests or companions.

"The literary princess herself had the bright eyes, straight features and comely and pleasing manners which all would have allowed to the emperor's daughter, even if she could not have been, with severe truth, said to have possessed them. She was placed upon a small bench, or sofa, the fair sex here not being permitted to recline, as was the fashion of the Roman ladies. A table before her was loaded with books, plants, herbs, and drawings. She sat on a slight elevation, and those who enjoyed the intimacy of the princess, or to whom she wished to speak in particular, were allowed during such sublime colloquy to rest their knees on the little dais or elevated place where her chair found its station, in a posture half standing, half kneeling. Three other seats, of different heights, were placed on the dais, and under the same canopy of state which overshadowed that of Princess Anna.

"The first, which strictly resembled her own chair in size and convenience, was one designed for her husband, Nicephorus Bryennius. He was said to entertain or affect the greatest respect for his wife's erudition, though the courtiers were of the opinion that he would have liked to absent himself from her evening parties more frequently than was particularly agreeable to the Princess Anna and her imperial parents. This was partly explained by the private tattle of the court, which averred that the Princess Anna Comnena had been more beautiful when she was less learned; and that, though still a fine woman, she had somewhat lost the charms of her person as she became enriched in her mind.

"To atone for the lowly fashion of the seat of Nicephorus Bryennius, it was placed as near to his princess as it could possibly be edged by the ushers, so that she might not lose one look of her handsome spouse, nor he the least particle of wisdom which might drop from the lips of his erudite consort.

"Two other seats of honor or, rather, thrones—for they had footstools placed for the support of the feet, rests for the arms, and embroidered pillows for the comfort of the back, not to mention the glories of the outspreading canopy—were destined for the imperial couple, who frequently attended their daughter's studies, which she prosecuted in public in the way we have intimated. On such occasions, the Empress Irene enjoyed the triumph peculiar to the mother of an accomplished daughter, while Alexius, as it might happen, sometimes listened with complacence to the rehearsal of his own exploits in the inflated language of the princess, and sometimes mildly nodded over her dialogues upon the mysteries of philosophy, with the Patriarch Zosimus, and other sages."

Scott's description gives a graphic presentation of the Princess Anna and of her relations with the various members of her family; and if we add the heir to the throne, her younger brother John, for whom she had profound contempt in spite of his many virtues, we have the group about whom revolve the narrative of her history and the chief events of her life.

It is not necessary for us to enter into the story of the First Crusade, and of the incidents of the intercourse of Franks and Greeks, which Anna tells so graphically in her history; but before calling attention to the literary qualities and historical value of her work, we must note those events which unfolded her character and, in her later years, brought about her exclusive devotion to literature.

Owing to his duplicity and lack of confidence in men, Alexius made his wife and his learned daughter his confidantes and his advisers in many of the affairs of State, and frequently utilized their services in gaining his ends. Both the imperial ladies were apt pupils in the school of political intrigue, and, in the last years of the emperor, endeavored to utilize their influence over him to the detriment of the heir-apparent and the elevation of Anna and her husband, the Cæsar Nicephorus. They accordingly formed a plot, during Alexius's last illness, to dispossess the eldest son John, that the three might share the government among them.

The empress introduced soldiers into the palace, and in the closing hours of the emperor's life sought to prevail on him to pronounce the words which would bring about the change in the succession. But the astute emperor realized his son's eminent fitness to wear the crown, and was not in sympathy with the ambitions of his learned but unscrupulous daughter. To all the entreaties of the empress he but cast his eyes heavenward and remarked on the vanities of human greatness. Despairing and enraged, the empress at last hastily left the room with a parting thrust at her imperial consort, which might fitly have been inscribed as an epitaph on his tomb: "You die as you lived—a hypocrite!" Meanwhile, during her absence, John entered the room, and, with the tacit consent of his dying father, removed from his finger the signet which gave him command of all the forces of the palace; and crushing, in their inception, the plots of the empress and her daughter, he was solemnly crowned the moment his father breathed his last.

John proved to be the most amiable character that ever occupied the Byzantine throne. But all his virtues did not suffice to quell the malice and disappointed ambition of his imperial sister. In spite of the failure of the first

conspiracy, the Princess Anna, "whose philosophy would not have refused the weight of a diadem," entered into another plot to dispossess her brother—already secure in the confidence of courtiers and subjects—and to elevate her husband, whom she felt sure of ruling. As John was already on the throne, however, the only way by which he could be disposed of was to have his eyes put out or to resort to the still worse crime of secret assassination. When her mild and gentle husband recoiled at the thought of such cruelty, Anna made to him the memorable response that Nature had mistaken the two sexes and had endowed him with the soul of a woman, contemptuously contrasting what she termed his feminine weakness with her own manly inhumanity.

This conspiracy, however, was also revealed before it had made any serious headway, and John deemed it necessary to confiscate his sister's wealth in order to make further intrigues impossible. He caused the Princess Anna to retire to a convent and bestowed her luxuriously furnished palace on his favorite minister, Axouchus. But the noble nature of Axouchus recoiled at being benefited by the princess's fall, and thought more of turning the situation to the emperor's advantage than of enriching himself. Accordingly, he suggested to the emperor that it would be better policy to ward off the malice of his enemies by restoring the palace to Anna, and seeming to ignore her futile plots. John felt the prudence of the advice, and impressed by the unselfish devotion of his friend,—a quality most rare in late Byzantine times,—replied in like spirit: "I should, indeed, be unworthy to reign if I could not forget my anger as readily as you forget your interest." Anna was reinstated in her palace.

But little is known of the rest of Anna Comnena's life. Tiring finally of the vanities of court life, disappointed in

all her intrigues for absolute power, and becoming ever more absorbed in her literary undertakings, she seems to have voluntarily sought the life of the cloister and to have spent the last decades of her career in peaceful retirement, engaged on her monumental work. She survived her brother John, who died in 1143, and was still at work on her history in 1145. The date of her death is unknown.

The great work of Anna Comnena is entitled the *Alexiad,* and is one of the most important works in the voluminous collection of the Byzantine historians. In fifteen books, it narrates the history of Alexius Comnenus; and is a completion and continuation of a work in four books, left by her husband, Nicephorus Bryennius. The first two books of Anna's work treat of the rise into power of the Comneni house, and of the early life of Alexius; the remaining thirteen are devoted to the events of his reign.

The work of Anna, as a contribution to historical literature, has very decided deficiencies. In spite of her professed love of truth, her filial vanity tempts her at all times to put her father and her family in the best light. The very title, *Alexiad* suggests rather an *epos*—a poem in prose—than a serious historical work, and emphasizes its epideictic tendency. As a woman, she is impressed with the concrete rather than the abstract, and describes brilliant state functions, church festivals, imposing audiences and the like with much more familiarity and enthusiasm than she displays in her treatment of the underlying causes and inner connections of events. But with all their faults, these memoirs are an authoritative account of a brilliant and important epoch, and of a ruler who for his military sagacity and political shrewdness ranks among the great personages of the Middle Ages.

The human traits of the author reveal themselves in every chapter of her work. Anna possessed a womanly

weakness for gossip and slander, and mingles her praise of the other prominent women of her time with a tincture of disparagement that must often be attributed to feminine jealousy. She possessed considerable wit and irony, but was intensely vain of her rank, her Greek origin and especially of her literary attainments. Nor must we fail to note the vaulting ambition of this otherwise attractive woman, an ambition which made her untrue to her brother and a conspirator against his throne and his life.

Anna Comnena realized that the chief censure of her work at the hands of contemporaries and of posterity would be the charge of partiality, and against this she seeks to defend herself in a striking passage:

"I must still once more repel the reproach which some may bring against me, as if my history were composed merely according to the dictates of the natural love for parents which is engraved on the hearts of children. In truth, it is not the effect of that affection which I bear to mine, but it is the evidence of matters of fact, which obliges me to speak as I have done. Is it not possible that one can have at the same time an affection for the memory of a father and for truth? For myself, I have never directed my attempt to write history otherwise than for the ascertainment of the matter of fact. With this purpose I have taken for my subject the history of a worthy man. Is it just, then, by the single accident of his being the author of my birth, his quality of my father ought to form a prejudice against me, which would ruin my credit with my readers? I have given, upon other occasions, proofs sufficiently strong of the ardor which I had for the defence of my father's interests, which those that know me can never doubt; but, on the present, I have been limited by the inviolable fidelity with which I respect the truth, which I should have felt conscious to

have veiled, under pretence of serving the renown of my father."

The authoress felt assured that a number of disturbances of nature and mysterious occurrences as interpreted by the soothsayers, foreboded the death of Alexius; thus she claimed for her father the indications of consequence, which were regarded by the ancients as necessary intimations of the sympathy of nature with the removal of great characters from the world. During his latter days, the emperor was afflicted with the gout. Weakened in body, and gradually losing his native energy, he once responded to the empress, when she spoke of how his deeds would be handed down in history: "The passages of my unhappy life call rather for tears and lamentations than for the praises you speak of." Finally asthma came to the assistance of the gout, and the prayers of monks and clergy, as well as the lavish distribution of alms, failed to stay the progress of the disease. At length passed away the Emperor Alexius, who, with all his faults, was one of the best sovereigns of the Eastern Empire.

His learned daughter, in the greatness of her grief, threw aside the reserve of literary eminence, and burst into tears and shrieks, tearing her hair, and defacing her countenance, while the Empress Irene cut off her hair, changed her purple buskins for black mourning shoes, and, casting from her her princely robes, put on a robe of black. "Even at the moment when she put it on," adds Anna, "the emperor gave up the ghost, and in that moment the sun of my life set."

Anna continues to express her lamentations at her loss, and upbraids herself that she survived her father, "that light of the world"; Irene, "the delight alike of the East and of the West"; and, also, her husband, Nicephorus. "I am indignant," she adds, "that my soul, suffering under

such torrents of misfortune, should still deign to animate my body. Have I not been more hard and unfeeling than the rocks themselves; and is it not just that one who could survive such a father and a mother and such a husband should be subjected to the influence of so much calamity? But let me finish this history, rather than any longer fatigue my readers with my unavailing and tragical lamentation!" The history then closes with the following couplet:

> "The learned Comnena lays her pen aside,
> What time her subject and her father died."

Taking it all in all, the best appreciation of the *Alexiad* is that of Gibbon, who thus characterizes the qualities of the work:

"The life of the Emperor Alexius has been delineated by a favorite daughter, who was inspired by a tender regard for his person and a laudable zeal to perpetuate his virtues. Conscious of the just suspicion of her readers, Anna Comnena repeatedly protests that, besides her personal knowledge, she has searched the discourse and writings of the most respectable veterans; that after an interval of thirty years, forgotten by, and forgetful of, the world, her mournful solitude was inaccessible to hope and fear; and that truth, the naked perfect truth, was more dear and sacred than the memory of her parent. Yet instead of the simplicity of style and narrative which wins our belief, an elaborate affectation of rhetoric and science betrays, in every page, the vanity of the female author.

"The genuine character of Alexius is lost in a vague constellation of virtues; and the perpetual strain of panegyric and apology awakens our jealousy to question the veracity of the historian and the merit of the hero. We cannot, however, refuse her judicious and important remark

that the disorders of the times were the misfortune and the glory of Alexius; and that every calamity which can afflict a declining empire was accumulated in his reign by the justice of heaven and the vices of his predecessors. . . . The reader may possibly smile at the lavish praise which his daughter so often bestows on a flying hero; the weakness or prudence of his situation might be mistaken for a want of personal courage; and his political arts are branded by the Latins with the names of deceit and dissimulation. . . ."

The story of the remaining princesses of the Comneni family is merely the mirroring of feminine beauty and frailty; and its sad chronicle goes to show that the Empire was deservedly hastening to its doom because the stamina sufficient to keep it alive was lacking.

John Comnenus was succeeded by his younger son Manuel, a renowned warrior about whose name have gathered many of the romances of chivalry. He was twice married, first to the virtuous Bertha of Germany, and, after her decease, to the beautiful Maria, a French or Latin princess of Antioch. Bertha had a daughter, who was destined for Bela, a Hungarian prince educated at Constantinople under the name of Alexius and looked upon as the heir-apparent. But his rights were set aside when Maria had a son named Alexius, who was in the direct line of male succession. Notwithstanding the virtues of his queens, Manuel, who was so valiant in war, showed himself in peace a licentious voluptuary. "No sooner did he return to Constantinople than he resigned himself to the arts and pleasures of a life of luxury: the expense of his dress, his table and his palace, surpassed the measure of his predecessors, and whole summer days were idly wasted in the delicious isles of the Propontis in the incestuous love of his niece, Theodora."

Manuel had a cousin, Andronicus, who was even more of a voluptuary than he—one whose career as a soldier of fortune and as a heartless roué marks him as the Byzantine Alcibiades. He indulged his favorite passions, love and war, without any regard to divine or human law. His lofty stature, manly strength and beauty, and dare-devil manner were so seductive that three ladies of royal birth fell victims to his charms. His mistresses shared his company with his lawful wife, and divided his affections with a crowd of actresses and dancing girls. He was a partaker of the pleasures, as well as of the perils, of Manuel; and while the emperor lived in public incest with his niece Theodora, Andronicus enjoyed the favors of her sister Eudocia. So enamored was she of her handsome lover, and so shameless in her conduct, that she gloried in the title of his mistress, and accompanied him to his military command in Cilicia. Upon his return, her brothers sought to expiate her infamy in the blood of Andronicus, but, through Eudocia's aid, he eluded his enemy. Proving treacherous, however, to the emperor, he was imprisoned for a long period in a tower of the palace at Constantinople, where his faithful wife shared his imprisonment and assisted him in making his escape.

Andronicus was later given a second command on the Cilician frontier. While here, he made a conquest of the beautiful Philippa, sister of the Empress Maria, and daughter of Raymond of Poitou, the Latin Prince of Antioch. For her sake, he deserted his station and wasted his time in balls and tournaments; and to his love the frail princess sacrificed her innocence, her reputation, and the offer of an advantageous marriage. The Emperor Manuel, however, urged on by his consort, resented this violation of the family honor, and recalled Andronicus from his infamous liaison. The indiscreet princess was left to weep

and repent of her folly; and Andronicus, deprived of his post, gathered together a band of adventurers of like spirit and undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. With bold effrontery, he declared himself a champion of the Cross; and his beauty, gallantry, and professions of piety captivated both king and clergy. The Latin King of Jerusalem invested the Byzantine prince with the lordship of Berytus, on the coast of Phœnicia. In his neighborhood there dwelt the young and handsome queen, Theodora,—the daughter of his cousin Isaac, and great-granddaughter of the Emperor Alexius,—who was widow of Baldwin III., King of Jerusalem. Because of her beauty, her talents, and her prudence, Theodora enjoyed the respect and admiration of all the Latin nobles. Andronicus became deeply enamored of his fair cousin, and she, returning his passion with equal ardor, became the third royal victim of his lust. So debased was the state of society among the Latin Christians—which was the case at Constantinople also—that the cousins carried on their amours with little affectation of secrecy. The Emperor Manuel being again enraged by the disgrace to the family name through the moral fall of another Comneni princess, Andronicus had to flee for his life, and Theodora accompanied him in his flight. She and her two illegitimate children were later captured and sent to Constantinople. Andronicus finally sought forgiveness from the emperor, and such was his charm that he was pardoned; he returned to Constantinople, and soon began the career of intrigue which eventually placed him on the throne.

Upon the death of Manuel, the Empress Maria acted as regent for her son Alexius II., a lad of thirteen. Her prime minister was Alexius Comnenus, a grandson of John II. Maria's beauty and charm of manner gave her considerable power over the young nobility. In the conflicts of the

nobles she warmly espoused the cause of her prime minister, and it was believed that a criminal attachment existed between them. The young emperor's sister Maria, with the Cæsar, her husband, attempted to drive the prime minister from power by a popular uprising. In the turmoil and chaos that followed, all eyes turned toward Andronicus. The voluptuary and adventurer responded to the call, and entered the city to be enthroned, alleging that it was his purpose to deliver the young emperor from evil counsellors. Cruelty was now added to his other serious crimes. The Princess Maria and her husband, the Cæsar, were poisoned; the Empress Maria, on a charge of treason, was condemned to death, and strangled; and Alexius II., the legitimate heir to the throne, was deposed and subjected to the same form of death as his unfortunate mother. The tyrant kicked the body of the innocent youth as it lay before him, and addressed it with a sneer: "Thy father was a *knave,* thy mother a *whore,* and thyself a fool!"

Owing to debauchery and crime, the family of the Comneni had degenerated. Through the nobility and greatness of its women in an earlier period, it had risen to the height of power; and through the debasement and weakness of its women, it finally fell. Andronicus was the last of the line—the most heinous monster that ever sat on the Byzantine throne. But his career in crime was cut short. The people rose up against the author of so many assassinations. Isaac Angelus, a nobleman, accused of treason, resisted arrest, and fled to Saint Sophia. A mob gathered and took his side against the mercenaries of Andronicus. The tyrant himself was seized and torn to pieces, and the Angeli succeeded the Comneni on the throne of Constantinople.

Isaac and Alexius Angelus, the two emperors whose reign occupied the years 1185–1204, between the fall of

Andronicus and the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders, were the two most feeble and despicable creatures who ever occupied the imperial throne. Euphrosyne, the empress of Alexius, however, was a woman of strong personality, though of licentious ways, and, as the last of the Byzantine empresses before the fall of Constantinople, she exhibited the strength as well as the weakness of that long line of self-asserting princesses whom we have been considering.

Owing to the idle disposition of her worthless husband, Euphrosyne assisted in conducting the business of the Empire; and so masterful was she that no minister dared take any step without her approval. Gibbon considers that there was no greater indication of the degradation of society at this time than that the proudest nobles of the Empire, members of the celebrated families of Comnenus, Ducas, Palæologus, and Cantacuzenus, contended for the honor of carrying Euphrosyne on her litter at public ceremonies. Her influence over the nobility was due to her beauty, her talents and her aptitude for business. But her inordinate vanity, reckless extravagance, and flagrant licentiousness brought great scandal upon the Empire even in those vicious times, and frequently led to violent quarrels with Alexius. Finally, the jealousy of the emperor at her licentious conduct lost all bounds. Alexius ordered her paramour to be assassinated, and the female slaves and the eunuchs of her household were put to the torture. The beautiful and accomplished Euphrosyne was compelled to leave the palace, and, like so many imperial dames noted for their devotion or their license, was immured in a convent.

The court, however, soon missed her talents and energy; Alexius himself was not equal to the ordinary duties of his office; the courtiers were unrestrained in their peculations,

and nowhere was there a restraining hand. Euphrosyne was recalled to save the dynasty, and, with even more than her former insolence, she entered once more upon a career of extravagance and shame. While her energy and skill in the affairs of state won admiration, her lavish expenditures of the public funds excited the dismay of the few thoughtful men of the day. The crowd enjoyed the splendid spectacle of her hunting parties and applauded their empress as she rode along on her richly caparisoned steed, with a falcon perched on her gold-embroidered glove, but such extravagances were but hastening the end of the doomed city.

The rest of the story is but too quickly told. Alexius III.,—Angelus,—had, by a clever *coup d'état,* displaced his brother Isaac; Alexius IV., son of Isaac, implored outside aid, and gave the marauders of the fourth Crusade an excuse to attack the city. Alexius III. fled for his life, and Alexius IV., after a brief reign, was caught and strangled by the usurper, Alexius Ducas. The Crusaders assaulted and sacked Constantinople when Alexius V., Ducas, the last of the emperors, fled in a galley by night, taking with him the Empress Euphrosyne and her daughter Eudocia whom he had married. He was afterward captured, tried for the murder of the young Alexius, and suffered death by being hurled from the top of a lofty pillar.

The end of Euphrosyne and her daughter Eudocia is not known. The latter had already had a sufficiently tragical history. Eudocia had first been married to Simeon, King of Servia, who later abdicated the throne and retired to a monastery. His son Stephen, enamored of the beauty of his young stepmother, married her. Later, a disgraceful quarrel arose. Eudocia was divorced by her second husband and, almost naked, was expelled from the palace.

In her desperate condition, abandoned by all, she would probably have perished had not Fulk, the king's brother, taken pity on her and sent her back to Constantinople. Alexius Ducas, who had already divorced two wives, was willing enough to wed the daughter of Euphrosyne, and after his execution the hand of the accommodating Eudocia was bestowed on Leo Sguros, the chief of Argos, Nauplia, and Corinth.

The stories of Euphrosyne and Eudocia are a sufficient confirmation of the corrupt state of society in the latter days of the Comneni and the Angeli. Andronicus and his mistresses, and Euphrosyne and her daughter, are no exaggerated types of the higher classes of the Empire. The clergy had grown indifferent to the licentiousness of the age, and many bishops and patriarchs were themselves venal and degraded. The people were too ready to follow in the footsteps of the higher classes. Therefore, through the loss of womanly virtue and manly strength, the Empire was on the verge of ruin.

Thus fell, on April 13, 1204, Constantinople—"The eye of the world, the ornament of nations, the fairest sight on earth, the mother of churches, the spring whence flowed the waters of faith, the mistress of orthodox doctrine, the seat of the sciences, draining the cup mixed for her by the hand of the Almighty, and consumed by fires as devouring as those which ruined the five Cities of the Plain."

Chapter XV

Womanhood of the Byzantine Decadence

XV

WOMANHOOD OF THE BYZANTINE DECADENCE

THE Byzantine Empire had fallen with its capital Constantinople, and the Latin Empire of Romania had taken its place. But the rule of the Franks was too weak to take an abiding hold on the provinces, and, after a brief and flickering existence, 1204–1261, it passed away, and a Greek dynasty was once more established in New Rome. While the Ottoman power was gaining strength, the Greek Empire was suffered to exist; but in the course of two centuries, through internal corruption and mismanagement, Byzantine dominion ceased to be an effective force in the world's affairs, and the city of Constantine easily fell a prey to the Mohammedan forces.

Though the Crusaders had captured the capital, the provinces refused to recognize the dominion of the Franks, and three Greek kingdoms were carved out of the remains of the Byzantine Empire by adventurous spirits who had left Constantinople rather than fall victims to the Western conquerors. Theodore Lascaris, the last to strike a blow for the doomed city, founded across the straits, out of the province of Bithynia, the empire of Nicæa, though his rights to royal power lay merely in his strong right arm and in his having married the daughter of the imbecile Alexius III. Alexius Comnenus, grandson of Andronicus I., had betaken himself to the eastern frontier of the Empire,

and, chiefly through the glamour of his name, had made for himself, out of the long strip of coast land at the south-east corner of the Black Sea, a kingdom that was destined to carry on an independent existence for nearly three hundred years as the empire of Trebizond. Furthermore, Michael Angelus, a cousin of Alexius III., became "despot" of Epirus and later conquered the Latin kingdom of Thessalonica. Finally, after the Greek empire of Nicæa had enjoyed a steady growth for over half a century, during which it absorbed the kingdom of Thessalonica, Michael Palæologus, the usurper of the Nicene throne, succeeded in wresting Constantinople from its Latin rulers, and established anew the Byzantine Empire, under the dynasty of the Palæologi.

In the stories of the dynasties of these various kingdoms we have not many glimpses into the history of woman, but wherever feminine names are mentioned woman is found to be exerting her customary influence over the affairs of state and the destinies of empires.

The dynasty of Theodore Lascaris was handed down through his daughter Irene, whose husband succeeded to the throne as the Emperor John III. The Empress Irene was much beloved because of her amiable character and domestic virtues, and there is preserved a beautiful incident of the affection she inspired in a young maiden. John Asan, the King of Bulgaria, had formed an alliance with John III. through the betrothal of his daughter Helena to Theodore, the heir-apparent to the Nicene throne. Highly esteeming the virtues of the Empress Irene, the Bulgarian king had sent the young Helena to be educated under her care. Later, when the alliance between the emperor and the king was broken off, Asan sent for his daughter, with the request that she return to Bulgaria. John III. scorned to retain his son's betrothed as a hostage, and suffered the

attendants to arrange her departure. But when the maiden ascertained that she was not to return to her dear mother the empress, her grief was inconsolable. Her tears and lamentations over the separation and her praises of the Nicene queen at length excited the serious displeasure of her father, and he had to threaten her with severe punishment if she did not cease to weep and mourn for her Greek mother. But her love for Irene was greater than the fear of punishment, and, in spite of the censure and the blandishments of her parent, she could never reconcile herself to the loss of the happy hours at the side of the virtuous and gifted empress. During Irene's lifetime John was uniformly successful, extending the bounds of his dominion and winning the love and devoted admiration of his subjects. But, after her death, another woman led him into evil ways.

John married as his second wife, in her twelfth year, the Princess Anna, natural daughter of the Emperor Frederick II. of Germany. Anna had brought in her train, as directress of her court, a beautiful Italian lady, Marchesina by name. The Emperor John fell violently in love with his child-wife's chief attendant. Marchesina soon received the honors conferred in courts on the recognized mistress of the sovereign, and was permitted to wear the dress reserved for members of the imperial family. Public opinion severely censured the emperor for his conduct, and one of the prominent bishops of the day, Nicephorus Blemmidas by name, found occasion to give Marchesina a severe rebuke. Blemmidas had so beautifully embellished the church of the monastery of which he was abbot, that it was frequently visited by members of the court. One day, while the abbot was conducting divine service in the chapel, the imperial mistress passed by with her attendants, and made up her mind to enter. But when Blemmidas

heard of her approach, he at once ordered the doors to be closed, declaring that never with his permission should an adulteress enter the sanctuary. Marchesina, incensed at so severe a rebuke, so publicly inflicted, hurried back to the palace, threw herself at the feet of her imperial lover, and implored him to avenge on the abbot the insult he had put upon her. But John was not regardless of public opinion, and, recognizing the mistake he had made, merely said in response to Marchesina's entreaties: "The abbot would have respected me, had I respected myself."

Woman, too, was in large measure the cause of the overthrow of the dynasty of Lascaris, and the usurpation of Michael Palæologus, scion of one of the most influential families of Constantinople. Theodore II., who succeeded his father John, grew testy and superstitious in his old age, and had reason to suspect the cunning and able Michael who was rapidly winning the popular favor. But Michael was undoubtedly spurred on to action against the dynasty by Theodore's outrageous conduct toward his sister Martha. The latter had a beautiful daughter who had been most tenderly reared as became her rank. To the surprise of all, the emperor ordered the family to bestow her in marriage on one of his pages, Valanidiotes. Though beneath the maiden in rank, the page succeeded in winning the affection of the highborn damsel, and the family were consenting to the union, when the emperor capriciously changed his mind, and compelled a betrothal between the maiden and a man of her own rank. A report that this marriage was not consummated led the superstitious emperor to suspect that both this event and a malignant attack of his disease were due to some charm practised by the mother.

In his vexation and rage, he ordered Martha, though connected by birth with the imperial family, to be enclosed

in a sack with a number of cats, which were from time to time pricked with pins that they might torture the unfortunate lady. Martha was brought into court with the sack thus bound about her neck, and was examined concerning her supposed witchcraft, but the suspicious tyrant could extract nothing from her on which to base a condemnation.

This unseemly action was an offence Michael could never forgive. From this time he began assiduously to plot against the throne. The story of his usurpation and of his cruelty toward the rightful emperor, the young lad, John IV.,—Ducas,—does not concern us here. Suffice it to say that he ascended the throne of Nicæa as Michael VIII., —Palæologus,—and was fortunate enough to capture the city of Constantinople and revive the Greek Empire there. Through the Empire of Nicæa the thread of tradition was unbroken, and from 1261 on we have once more a Byzantine Empire.

The history of this concluding period, 1261–1453, embracing the dynasty of the Palæologi, is the most degrading portion of the national annals. Michael is renowned for being the restorer of the Eastern Empire, but his throne was gained through baseness and cruelty, and he left to his descendants a heritage of vice and crime of such a nature that the Empire survived for a century or two not because of its intrinsic worth, but because the Ottomans were not yet ready to seize it. It is a period notable for the absence of literary taste, of patriotic feeling, of political honesty, of civil liberty. The emperors are, as a rule, immoral and capricious men, utterly selfish in their aims and their pursuits, and each one leaves the Empire somewhat weaker than he found it.

The new Empire of Constantinople and that of Trebizond existed side by side, and frequent intermarriages

took place between the royal families. By studying conjointly the annals of the Palæologi and the Comneni we become acquainted with a number of the princesses of these royal houses, and can form some idea of the character of Greek womanhood in this age of decadence, and of the social life of the times as it affects woman's position and aspirations.

The women of the two rival houses appear, as a rule, superior in character, judgment, and virtue to the men, and this difference between the males and females of the imperial families is so marked, that we would fain know more of the system of education for women which produced an effect so singular and so uniform. It must have been due to the fact that in spite of the general demoralization, the life of the convents in which the princesses were trained was pure and uplifting, the methods of instruction thorough, the discipline severe; while the clergy who had in charge the education of the princes were so bent on their own preferment and the acquirement of political power, that they aimed rather at gaining an ascendency over their imperial wards than in imparting the instruction which would have made them great rulers.

The only empress of the Palæologi, however, to gain supreme power and to win a place in history, was of foreign birth. Anne of Savoy, by the nomination of her dying husband, Andronicus III. (1328–1341), and the custom of the Empire, was made regent of her son, John V., Palæologus, a lad of nine years. Her reign was made memorable through her struggles with a powerful courtier, who aroused civil war and ascended the throne for a time as John VI., Cantacuzenus (1347–1354).

Byzantine etiquette required the widowed empress to weep for nine days beside the body of her deceased husband, who was laid out in state in the monastery of

the Guiding Virgin, whither he had retired when death was near and where he assumed the habit and the devotions of a monk. But John Cantacuzenus, the grand *domesticos* and first minister of the Empire, was bent on playing the rôle of earlier usurpers, and during her absence determined to establish himself in the imperial palace as guardian of the emperor. The empress, recognizing the danger of infringement on the rights of her child, deemed it necessary to shorten the period of mourning to three days, and returned to the palace to assert her authority as regent. Then began a course of intrigue between the two parties. Cantacuzenus instituted a rebellion against the regent, and by his followers was crowned and invested with the imperial robe. Under the guidance of the patriarch and the grand duke Apocaucus, the Empress Anne adopted forceful measures to intimidate the partisans of the rebels. Among the interesting women of this period was Theodora, the mother of Cantacuzenus, a woman of preëminent virtue and talent, far superior in ability and moral force to her son. But against her the vengeance of Anne was chiefly directed. The aged lady was thrown into prison by order of the regent, and was subjected to great cruelty and privations until death came to her relief. The young emperor, John V., was solemnly crowned. Apocaucus was appointed prime minister, and a vigorous war was prosecuted against the rebels, who were threatened with extermination. To save his cause Cantacuzenus treacherously turned to the common enemy, the Turk, and sacrificing his daughter Theodora on the altar of his ambition gave her in marriage to Orkhan, and sent her to dwell at Brusa, as a member of the Sultan's harem. All the religious people of the day were incensed at this violation of common decency and lack of paternal feeling, but the tone of morality was too low to cause serious opposition.

Meanwhile, there was discord in the palace. The Empress Anne fell out with her chief supporter. She had a violent quarrel with the patriarch. Her prime minister Apocaucus was assassinated. Through the aid of his Turkish ally Cantacuzenus was successful. The empress-regent showed a determination to defend herself in the palace, but her partisans were less courageous than she, and she was compelled to submit. But Cantacuzenus was as wily as he was ambitious. Recognizing the strength of his opponents, after he himself had been crowned emperor, he determined on the marriage of his daughter Helena with the young heir apparent, and agreed to associate John V. with him on the throne when he reached the age of twenty-five. The children, for John was only fifteen and Helena thirteen, were betrothed and wedded with great ceremony, and then received the crown, and the courtiers and people were entertained by the rare spectacle of two emperors and three empresses seated on their thrones.

"The strange spectacle delighted the gazers; but it was not viewed without some feeling of contempt, for it was generally known that the imperial crowns were bright with false pearls and diamonds; that the robes were stiffened with tinsel; that the vases were of brass, not gold; and instead of the rich brocade of Thebes, the hangings were of gilded leather."

Cantacuzenus deserves to rank with the two Angeli as the third of the great destroyers of the Eastern Empire. Through civil wars he depleted its resources; and by introducing the Turk into his dominions, he paved the way for the final downfall. Fortunately, John V. asserted himself at the age of twenty-four; Cantacuzenus was tonsured and placed in a monastery where he passed the rest of his days in literary labors. In native gifts and force

of character, and in her checkered history, the Empress Anne of Savoy deserves a place by the side of the earlier self-asserting empresses of Constantinople.

The tale of the last hundred years of the Byzantine Empire is a mere bit of local history, and no longer forms an important warp in the woof of the annals of Christendom. Women there were who were deserving of a better destiny, but they are naturally obscured in the general demoralization. The Mussulman might have taken Constantinople seventy-five years earlier. The end came on May 29, 1453. The city was captured by Mohammed II., and Constantine XIII., the last of the Cæsars, the worthy scion of degenerate sires, fell in the breach. Mohammed proceeded quickly to convert Constantinople from a Christian into a Turkish capital. The city was sacked. The Byzantine women were sold into slavery, or became wives or concubines of the conquerors and passed the rest of their days in a Turkish harem. And, from this date, for centuries the life of Greek womanhood under Turkish domination was passed in oppression and obscurity.

The fragment of the Greek Empire known in the history of the Middle Ages as the Empire of Trebizond was the creation of accident. A young man descended from the worst tyrant of Constantinople, but of an illustrious name which retained the glamour inspired by the founder of the Comneni dynasty, grasped the sovereignty of a most important commercial centre, and his descendants continued to hold it until overwhelmed by the all-conquering power of the Turk. The Empire of Trebizond possesses unique grandeur in the romances of the West: the beauty of its princesses was a theme of universal praise; its reputed wealth and splendor excited the cupidity of Venetian and Genoese merchants. But it was, after all, an insignificant kingdom, which owed its strength merely to the weakness

of surrounding peoples; and whose ostentatious court ceremonials were but an attempt to keep up the traditions of the Byzantine Empire and of the Comneni family in more prosperous days.

Shortly after the assassination of Andronicus by Isaac II., —Angelus,—his son Manuel, with other members of his family, met a similar fate. Manuel was survived by two sons, Alexius and David, the former a little lad of four. The boys were concealed for a time, and were brought up in obscurity in Constantinople, where faithful friends gave them an education worthy of their station. At the time when the Crusaders captured the city, Alexius escaped, raised an army, and took possession of Trebizond, then one of the most important commercial seats on the borders of the Black Sea. The surrounding province gladly recognized him as the lawful sovereign of the Roman Empire, and the Comneni dynasty was continued through him for two and a half centuries or more. To mark the legitimacy of his claim, and to prevent confusion with the rival family of Alexius III.,—Angelus,—Alexius assumed the designation of "Grand-Comnenus," and by this title the family was known until its extermination.

The earlier years of the Empire of Trebizond were notable chiefly for the efforts of its rulers to retain and extend their power, which was circumscribed by the stronger empire of Nicæa. After the latter had been merged into the restored Byzantine Empire with Constantinople as its capital, Trebizond was still strong enough to maintain an independent existence. A league was formed between the reigning sovereigns, Michael VIII.,—Palæologus,—of Constantinople, and John II., then Emperor of Trebizond, through the espousal of the latter to Michael's youngest daughter, Eudocia, who was destined to show herself one of the best and most capable of the Palæologi princesses.

The ceremony was solemnized with great ostentation on September 12, 1282. The question of precedence was an important one, as the Trebizond government had considered itself the direct successor of the Empire of the Cæsars. But through this marriage the wily monarch of Constantinople gained the advantage; for John on this occasion laid aside the title of "Emperor of the Romans," to be henceforth reserved exclusively for the sovereign of the city of the Golden Horn, while that of Trebizond assumed the title of "Emperor of all the East, Iberia, and Perateia." Furthermore, the inhabitants of the city saw in the respective marriage robes a certain inferiority of the Trebizontine monarch to the family of his wife; for while the robes of John were embellished with single-headed eagles, the bride appeared in a dress covered with double-headed eagles to mark her rank in the Empire of the East and West as a princess of the Palæologi, born in the purple chamber.

John and his royal bride had not been long settled on the throne when he experienced a sudden and unexpected discomfiture at the hands of an aspiring sister. Theodora, the oldest child of Manuel I. by his marriage with Roussadan, an Iberian princess, jealous of the popularity of her sister-in-law, and proud of the superiority of Comneni traditions to those of the usurper of Constantinople, availed herself of the party intrigues of the nobles, and the popular dissensions in the capital, to assemble an army, surprise her imperial brother, and mount the throne. Her glory was of brief duration, but the existence of coins bearing her name and effigy demonstrates that her power was stable and that she was fully recognized as a sovereign of the Empire. No clue exists which enables us to determine how Theodora obtained the throne or how she was at length driven from power, but John appears to have

finally recovered his throne and capital and to have expelled the ambitious princess.

During succeeding years the influence of Byzantine womanhood and the relations between the two kingdoms continued prominent. John died in 1297, leaving two sons, Alexius II. and Michael. The former succeeded his father at the age of fifteen, and was placed under the guardianship of his mother Eudocia's brother, the Byzantine emperor Andronicus II. Andronicus ordered his ward, the young emperor of Trebizond, though an independent sovereign prince, to marry Irene, the daughter of a Byzantine subject, Choumnus, one of his favorite ministers. But the idea of a Comnenus marrying below his station was offensive both to Alexius and his people. In obedience to the blood within his veins, and in contempt of his guardian's command, Alexius rejected the proposed mésalliance, and married the daughter of an Iberian prince.

The young married couple presented a beautiful example of conjugal tenderness and devotion, but this did not soften the hard heart of the guardian. Andronicus even went so far as to endeavor to make the Greek Church declare the marriage null and void on the ground that it had been contracted by a union without the consent of his guardian. But the patriarch and clergy, sympathizing with the lovers, and alarmed at the ludicrous position in which they would be placed, took advantage of the interesting condition of the bride to refuse to gratify the spleen of the chagrined emperor.

At this time also, Eudocia, the mother of Alexius, who was in partial durance in the imperial palace at Constantinople, saw an opportunity of obtaining her freedom and of returning to her dominions. Her brother Andronicus was offended with her because she had rejected his proposal to form a second marriage with the Kral of Servia.

She persuaded her brother that her influence over her son, who was devotedly attached to her, would have far more weight in making the young emperor agree to a divorce than the sentence of an ecclesiastical tribunal whose authority he was able to decline; and to this end she obtained her brother's permission to return to Trebizond. Upon arriving at her son's court Eudocia was so much impressed with the conjugal fidelity of her son Alexius that she at once approved of his conduct, and supported him in his determination to resist the tyrannical pretensions of his guardian. Eudocia is an excellent example of the superiority of the Palæologi women over their weaker and more selfish brothers. In every situation, even in her months of exile from her dominions, she maintained herself with dignity, and in her careful rearing of her son and regard for his interests she exhibited motherly traits of a high order.

In the next generation there was also an alliance between the royal families of the two kingdoms. The emperor Basilius, second son of Alexius II., married Irene Palæologina, the natural daughter of Andronicus III. of Constantinople. Basilius had no legitimate issue, but falling in love with a beautiful lady of Trebizond, also named Irene, he made her his mistress and conferred on her every possible honor. She bore him four children. To insure the succession of one of his natural sons, Basilius in 1339 persuaded or forced the clergy to celebrate a public marriage with his Trebizontine mistress, though there is no evidence that he obtained a divorce from his lawful wife Irene, beyond his own decree. He died suddenly in the April following his marriage to his mistress.

Irene Palæologina, who was, in spite of his second nuptials, universally regarded as the lawful wife of Basilius, was suspected of having hastened his end; and her unfaithful

husband had certainly tried the soul of the proud lady. At any rate she was prepared for the sad event, and had already organized a faction which placed her on the throne, as the second independent Empress of Trebizond.

This promptitude in profiting by her husband's death, was worthy of the first Empress Irene in Byzantine history, and gave just ground for suspicion. But in considering an age when it was usual for people to circulate calumnious reports against their rulers, the evidence should be strong before we condemn the Palæologi princess. However, the flagrant immorality of the court circles, and the lightness of character of Irene herself, as well as her conduct after the event, tended to give credibility to the rumor.

Irene, as soon as she was safely established on the throne, sent off her rival of Trebizond and the two sons of Basilius to Constantinople where her father Andronicus detained them as hostages for the tranquillity of her empire. A strong party of the nobility, however, who had hoped to gain wealth and power through the favor of the Trebizontine Irene, whom they purposed to make regent during the minority of her children, were chagrined at the success of the schemes of the Palæologi princess, and at once began to plan her downfall. Two great parties arose, and the little empire was once more disturbed by the turmoil of civil war. Irene, with all her daring, was, like her father, of a gay and thoughtless disposition, and did not fully realize the danger of her situation. She recognized, however, that a second husband would strengthen her cause; and she urged her father Andronicus to send her a husband chosen from among the Byzantine nobles, who could aid her in repressing the factions which threatened her throne. Andronicus gave a favorable reception to Irene's ambassadors, but died before he had time seriously

to attend to her request. The light-minded Irene consoled herself during the delay by falling in love with the grand *domesticos* of her palace. But this bit of favoritism only divided her own court into factions and strengthened the cause of her enemies.

A new storm now burst over the head of the thoughtless empress. Another woman, whose title to rule was far stronger than that of Irene, appeared to claim the throne. Anna, called Anachoutlon, was the eldest daughter of the Emperor Alexius II. She had in early womanhood taken the veil, and until this time had lived in seclusion. The opposition party searched out her retreat and persuaded her to quit her monastic dress and escape to Lazia, where she was proclaimed Empress of Trebizond, as the nearest legitimate heir of her brother Basilius. All the provincials united in demanding the sovereignty of a member of the house of Grand-Comnenus in preference to the usurpation of a Palæologi princess, who was planning to marry a foreigner. The popular demand for the rule of a scion of the house of Grand-Comnenus gave Anna a triumphal march to the capital, and with but little opposition she was admitted within the citadel and universally recognized as the lawful empress. Irene was dethroned after a troubled reign of one year and four months. Three weeks later Michael Grand-Comnenus, second son of John II. and Eudocia, who had been selected at Constantinople as a suitable husband of Irene, arrived on the scene, to find the change of sovereignty. The Empress Anna was surrounded by a cabal of powerful chiefs, who determined to keep the reins of power in their hands. She graciously received her kinsman, but he was later treacherously seized and imprisoned by Anna's partisans. Irene was sent on, under suitable escort, to Constantinople, to pass the rest of her life in retirement. The treatment of Michael

aroused the fury of many adherents of the house of Grand-Comnenus. Another upheaval followed. John III., son of Michael, was brought over from Constantinople, and proclaimed emperor by a constantly growing faction. The hapless Anna, who had doubtless ofttimes regretted giving up the peaceful life of the monastery for the troubles and cares of a crown, was taken prisoner in the palace, and was immediately strangled. She had occupied the throne hardly more than a year.

The next period of importance in our study of Trebizontine princesses is that covered by the long reign—1349–1390—of Alexius III., the second son of Basilius by Irene of Trebizond. His wife was also a Byzantine princess, Theodora, the daughter of Nicephorus Cantacuzenus, brother of the emperor John V., Cantacuzenus, whose stormy career of opposition to Anne of Savoy we have already noticed. Theodora bore to Alexius a number of beautiful daughters, whom he utilized when they became of marriageable age to form alliances with his powerful neighbors, both Mohammedan and Christian. His eldest daughter, Eudocia, Alexius first wedded to the Emir Tadjeddin, who had gained possession of the important district of Limnia; after Tadjeddin was slain in a quarrel with a neighboring emir, the beautiful and accomplished princess became the wife of the Byzantine emperor, John V. That aged monarch had chosen her to be the bride of his son, the emperor Manuel II.,—Palæologus; but when she arrived at Constantinople for the celebration of the nuptials, her beauty and grace so powerfully captivated the decrepit old debauchee that he set aside the inclinations of his son, who was also enamored of his prospective bride, and married the young widow himself.

Anna, another daughter of Alexius, was married to Bagrat VI., King of Georgia; and a third daughter was

bestowed on Taharten, Emir of Erdsendjan. Alexius's sisters met a similar fate. His sister Maria was married to Koutloubeg, the chief of the great Turkoman horde of the White Sheep; and his sister Theodora, to Hadji Omer, Emir of Chalybia.

These marriages with Mohammedan nobles, though one revolts at the immolation of Christian maidens on the altar of selfish expedience, are yet the strongest proof how the Christian state was being surrounded by powerful Mohammedan chieftains, who must be conciliated to ward off the evil day of extinction. Such alliances, too, may account in part for the moral degradation which henceforth characterizes the house of Grand-Comnenus.

In the next generation, Alexius IV. wedded Theodora Cantacuzenus, of the celebrated Byzantine family of that name. Neglected by her husband, the princess consoled herself with too close an intimacy with one of the chamberlains of the palace; her son John, indignant at his mother's disgrace, assassinated her lover with his own hands. He later murdered his own father, and ascended the throne as John IV.

Under this cruel and intriguing ruler and his successors, the Christian population of the country regarded the dynasty of Grand-Comnenus as a dynasty of pagan or foreign tyrants, so little of religion or morality survived in Trebizond. His alliances with the Turkoman plunderers of the frontiers increased the popular aversion. John early recognized the growing strength of the Turks, and sought to prepare to meet the coming invasion by forming an alliance with Ouzoun Hassan, chief of the Turkomans of the White Horde, whose daring courage and rapid career of conquest made him, in the general estimation, a formidable rival of Mohammed II.

When invited to join in the league against Mohammed, Hassan demanded as the price of his assistance the hand of the emperor's daughter Katherine, renowned throughout the Orient as the most beautiful virgin in the East. John IV. was highly pleased at the prospect of purchasing so powerful an alliance on such easy terms, and readily agreed, doubtless without consulting the fair Katherine. Yet, in order to save his credit as a Christian emperor, and perhaps as a balm to his own conscience in sacrificing his daughter to an infidel, he stipulated in the treaty that Katherine should be permitted always the exercise of her own religion, and should have the privilege of keeping a certain number of Christian ladies as her attendants, and of Greek priests in her suite, to serve a private chapel in the harem. It is to the honor of a Mussulman to observe that Hassan strictly kept his promises, even after the empire of Trebizond and the house of Grand-Comnenus were no more.

Before this matrimonial alliance was fulfilled, John came to his end; but his brother David, who displaced the heir and usurped the throne,—a fit agent for consummating the ruin of an empire,—completed the arrangement. The beautiful Katherine was sent with suitable pomp to the court of her bridegroom, Hassan, and readily adapted herself to the changed conditions of her life. She soon acquired great influence over her infidel husband, who was the soul of honor and good faith, and in every phase of her life which is known to us she showed herself the most attractive character of the whole house of Comnenus.

But no matrimonial alliance could save the doomed empire. Constantinople had fallen in 1453, and it was merely a matter of time when the last surviving Greek kingdom should succumb to the Mohammedan yoke. Mohammed II., by the exercise of intrigue, gradually detached from the emperor his infidel allies. When finally the Mohammedan

forces came against the city, David showed that he possessed nothing of the heroic spirit of the last Constantine. He offered but a feeble resistance, and readily sacrificed the city to outrage and plunder on an assurance of safety for himself and his family. David basely deserted his empire and embarked on board one of the Turkish galleys, with his family and his treasures, to enjoy for a brief period luxurious ease in the European appanage assigned him by Mohammed.

David's family consisted of seven sons and a daughter borne him by Helena Cantacuzena, his second wife, who, through her devotion to husband and children, deserves to rank among the noblest of mothers in the chronicles of history.

The dethroned emperor was not long permitted to enjoy the repose he had purchased with so much infamy. Mohammed at length suspected him of carrying on secret communications with Ouzoun Hassan, his niece's husband, and plotting to reëstablish the Empire of Trebizond. He was suddenly arrested on his luxurious estate, and conveyed with his whole family to Constantinople. While they were on the way a letter from Despina Katon—the popular designation of the fair Katherine—to her uncle David was intercepted by the Ottoman emissaries. In this the amiable spouse of Hassan, requested David to send her brother, or one of her cousins, to be educated at her husband's court. This letter afforded convincing proof to the suspicious Sultan that David was plotting with Ouzoun Hassan and other enemies of the Porte for the restoration of his empire.

The bare suspicion of Mohammed was a sentence of death to the whole race of Grand-Comnenus. As soon as the unfortunate prisoners reached Constantinople, David was ordered to embrace Islam under pain of death. His

life had been ignoble, but in his death David showed that he still possessed something of the nobility of the Comneni, and he chose death rather than dishonor his name by renouncing his religion. David, his seven sons and his nephew Alexius were all slaughtered in one day, in the year 1470: the daughter was lost in a Turkish harem.

The bodies of the princes were thrown out unburied beyond the walls. No one ventured to approach them for fear of the vengeance of the Sultan. They would have been abandoned to the dogs, the usual scavengers of Christian flesh, had not the Empress Helena, the wife and mother, repaired to the spot where they lay. She was clad in a peasant's garb, to escape detection, and carried a spade in her hand. The day was spent in guarding the remains of husband and children from the ravenous dogs, and in digging a grave to receive their bodies. In the darkness of the night a few faithful souls came to her relief and assisted her in committing the bodies to the dust. The widowed and childless empress, who had seen the last of her race, the last of the glories of the Byzantine kingdom, then retired to a convent to pass the remainder of her days in prayers for the repose of the souls of her loved ones. Grief soon brought her to a refuge from all earthly sorrows in the grave.

The story of womanhood in the Byzantine Empire of the decadence is an extremely sad one. The times were out of joint; corruption and immorality prevailed; the emperors were almost without exception extremely selfish, cruel, and unprincipled. It was impossible for womanhood in such a period not to be tainted by the general ruin, yet we have found many noble characters, and whatever may have been their feminine weaknesses and foibles, however much their lots may have been circumscribed by the caprices of sovereigns and the ceremonials of courts,

the princesses of the Comneni, the Palæologi and the Cantacuzeni have, as a rule, shown themselves in virtue and in capability the superiors of their brothers.

The rest of our story of Christian women of Greek or Byzantine traditions is soon told. During all the period we have covered in this chapter there was a flourishing mediæval life further south under Greek skies, in Athens, under a Frankish and, later, a Florentine duchy, and in the Peloponnesus, or the Morea, under Frankish or Venetian princes. But this was the feudal life of mediæval times transferred to Greek soil, the life of foreigners among a conquered people, and does not concern us here.

When the Turks extended their conquests over Greek lands, it looked as if the torch of freedom, the light of Hellenic tradition, the lamp of Christianity which had for so many centuries brightened the life of Oriental women, had been extinguished forever. But all during the dark age of Turkish oppression, the Christian Church kept alive the nobler aspirations of the Greek race. Women have always been the chief exponents of religious faith, and Greek women handed on from generation to generation the traditions of religion and liberty and intellectual culture. Many of the women of Greek lands were forced to spend their lives within the narrow walls of a Turkish harem; many saw their children taken from them and carried to Constantinople to be brought up as Mussulmans for the service of the Sultan; many had to undergo ignominy and insults at the hands of petty officials. But the Church found a constant and enthusiastic ally in Greek womanhood in preserving the language, the spirit, the love of liberty, of the ancient Greeks.

Hence, when in the early decades of the nineteenth century the fulness of time had come for a portion of the Greek race to rid itself of Turkish domination, the women

showed an intense love of country which enabled them not only to inspire their brothers in the fight for freedom, but they also frequently shared with them the toils and privations of actual conflict. We read in the histories of the Greek War of Independence how women at times accompanied the Greek soldiers on their forages, carrying arms and ammunition and frequently fighting themselves; how they kept the standard of military honor high, and were unsparing critics of the mettle of their husbands.

There is no more inspiring folk tale in the records of history than the legend of the Suliote women in the struggle of their people against Ali, the cruel and rapacious tyrant of Janina. Bred in the mountains of Chamouri, they refused to submit to his yoke, and the valiant people had to see the gradual extermination of their race. They had ventured to defy the rising star of Ali, and all that force or treachery could accomplish was inflicted upon them. Tzavellas was one of their leaders, and the valor of Moscho, his wife, has been commemorated in popular verse, as typical of Greek womanhood in their struggle for independence:

"This is the famous Suli, is Suli the renowned,
Where the little children march to war, the women and the children:
Where the wife of Tzavellas combats, her sabre in her hand,
Her babe upon one arm, her gun upon the other, and her apron filled with cartridges."

The final incident of the unequal struggle which shows the desperate determination and courage of these Greek women, who suckled these *klephts* of the mountains and kept alive that spirit of liberty which finally won independence from Turkish misrule, has been thus described:

"Some sixty of these Suliote women, with their children, were assembled on a ledge of rock overhanging a

sheer precipice, and, having witnessed the gradual extermination of their defenders, they resolved to die by their own act rather than fall into the hands of the grisly tyrant of Janina. The position which they occupied suggested an easy form of death, and the manner in which they sought it was tragically weird and grim. First, each mother took her child, embraced it, and, turning her head away from the pitiful scene, pushed it over the edge of the abyss. Then these sixty women linked their hands together, and, singing the familiar daring song of Suli above the rattle of the musketry, danced the old *surtos* measure round and round the ledge of rock, having each her back to the void as the winding chain approached the brink. And every time the chain wound round, one dancer, the last in the line, unlinked her hand, took one step back, and fell down into annihilation. One by one, without haste, without pause, singing the dancing song, they followed each other down that leap of death, until the last sprung over alone, consecrating the mountain with their blood an altar of liberty, from which, ere long, a flame arose that fired those ancient ranges from sea to sea."

Such was the spirit of Greek womanhood in the trying year of the Greek War of Independence; and it was this spirit which enabled the Greeks to struggle on, without resources and allies, amid discouragements and misrepresentations, till finally the nations of Europe came to their rescue and established the modern Greek kingdom on a sure basis.

Athens was finally chosen as the seat of the new Greek government; and in 1837 the Bavarian king Otho and his lovely bride, the princess Amalia, entered Athens in triumph, and the kingdom of Hellas was fairly launched. Within the memory of living men the dynasty of Otho fell, and a scion of the royal house of Denmark, King

George, with his Russian consort, Queen Olga, now holds sway in Athens.

The modern Greek woman of the higher classes has become so thoroughly cosmopolitan in her culture that she has lost in large measure her distinctive traits. Her sympathy is rather with Parisian life than with English, though her deportment is marked by a sobriety of manner partaking rather of Greek repose than of French effusion. Many faces seen in Greek lands exhibit, in profile especially, the Greek type of beauty.

The women of the lower classes, no doubt, preserve many of the characteristics of the race in all ages, in spite of the intermingling with foreign peoples and the results of centuries of Turkish oppression, which time alone can eradicate. Domestic fidelity, maternal affection, devotion to religious observances, the cheerful discharge of the duties and responsibilities of wedded life, are nowhere more beautifully illustrated than among the Greek women of to-day.

It is the Christian religion which makes the life of Greek women under King George superior to that of their sisters under the dominion of the Sultan, and we may hope that in the fulness of time the Greek women of Europe and Asia outside of the Hellenic kingdom may enjoy, untrammelled by Turkish authority, the rights and privileges of that religion which has elevated the sex, and that the Greek woman of the future may combine the personal graces of her sister in antiquity with the cultivation of the soul and the enlargement of spirit which comes to women with the inculcation of Christianity.

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